

A MAGAZINE WORTH CROWING ABOUT

SECOND NOV. NUMBER

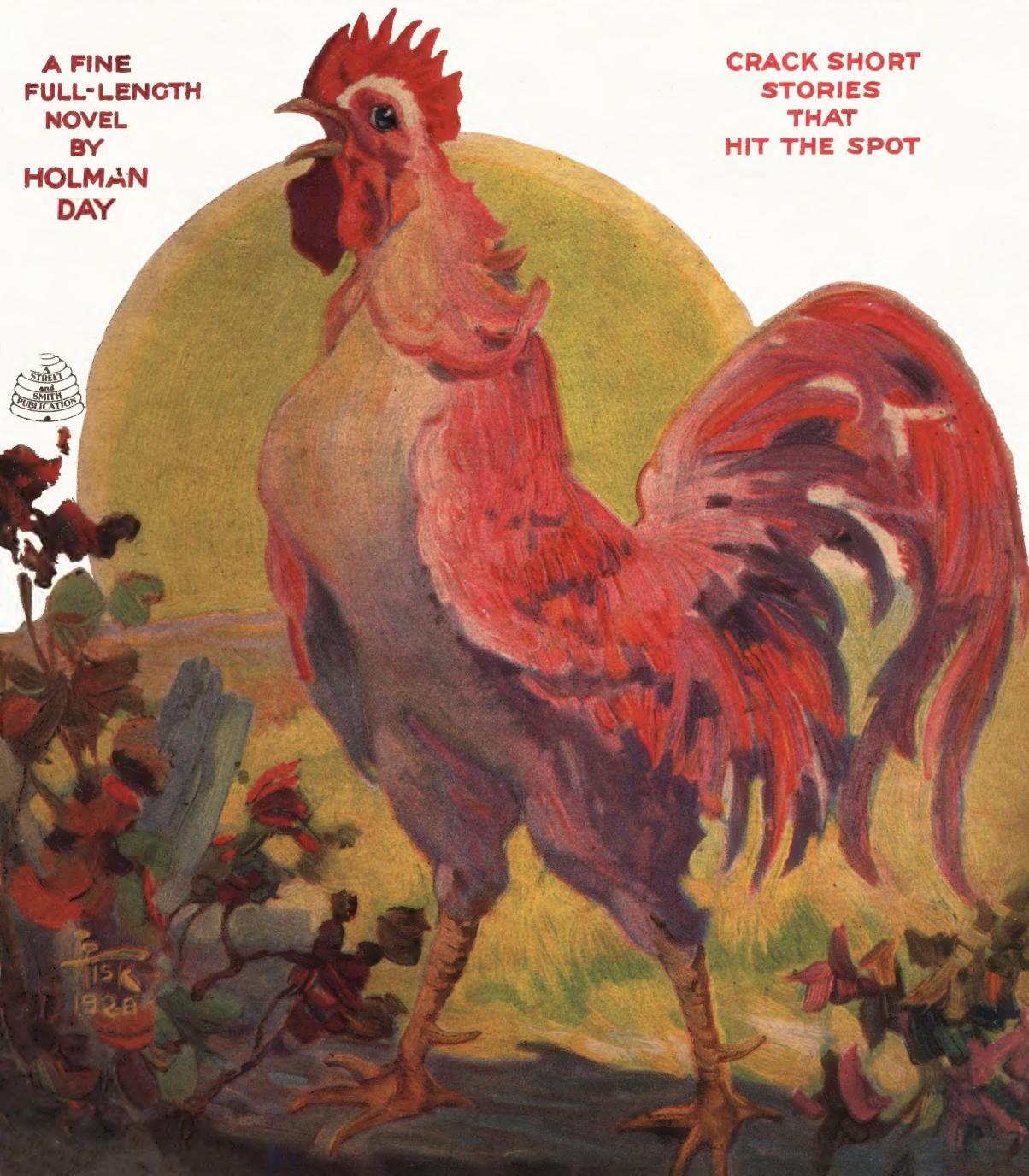
OCT. 20, 1928

# The Popular MAGAZINE

20¢  
25¢ IN CANADA

A FINE  
FULL-LENGTH  
NOVEL  
BY  
HOLMAN  
DAY

CRACK SHORT  
STORIES  
THAT  
HIT THE SPOT



# DRAW ME and WIN A PRIZE

## Do You Like to Draw?

Copy this dancing girl and send us your drawing—perhaps you'll win first prize. This contest is for amateurs only (17 years of age or more), so do not hesitate to enter, even if you haven't had much practice.

**1st Prize . . . . . \$100.00**

**2nd Prize . . . . . \$50.00**

**3rd Prize . . . . . \$25.00**

**4th Prize . . . . . \$15.00**

**5th Prize . . . . . \$10.00**

**6th to 15th Prizes, ea. \$5.00**

**To the Next 50 Best Drawings—A Fountain Pen**

**Free!** Everyone entering a drawing in this contest may have his or her art ability tested free! When your contest drawing is received, we will mail you our Art Ability Questionnaire. Fill this in and return it, and you will receive our critic's frank report of your natural sense of design, proportion, color, perspective, etc.—and with it our book "YOUR FUTURE," showing work of Federal Students and telling you all about the Federal home-study course. This is free and places you under no obligation whatever.

This interesting analysis has been the start for many Federal students, who through proper training of their ability are now commercial artists, earning \$2,000, \$4,000, \$5,000 and \$8,000 yearly—some even more. The Federal School has won a reputation as "the School famous for successful students." Read the rules carefully and enter this contest—see what you can do.

**FEDERAL SCHOOL OF COMMERCIAL DESIGNING**  
64 Federal Schools Building, Minneapolis, Minn.



### RULES FOR CONTESTANTS

This contest open only to amateurs, 17 years old or more. Professional commercial artists and Federal students are not eligible.

#### Note these rules carefully:

1. Make your drawing of a girl and shadow exactly 6 inches high, on paper 5 inches wide by 7 inches high. Draw only the girl and shadow, not the lettering
2. Use only pencil or pen.
3. No drawings will be returned.
4. Write your name, address, age, and occupation on the back of your drawing.
5. All drawings must be received in Minneapolis by Nov. 10, 1928. Prizes will be awarded for drawings best in proportion and neatness by Faculty members of the Federal Schools, Inc. All contestants will be notified of the prize winners. Make your drawing of the girl now and send it to the address given in this ad.

**L. L. COOKE**  
—the man who has trained and helped many thousands of other men into Big-Pay electrical jobs in all parts of the world.



**\$30 A DAY!**  
"Dear Mr. Cooke: I was making \$25 a week, when I enrolled. Now with your Electrical Shop I make as high as \$30 a day."

A. J. Daigneault  
225 Worcester  
Southbridge, Mass.



**\$3,500 A YEAR!**  
"Dear Mr. Cooke: When I began with you I was just a common laborer. Now my salary is \$3,500 a year."

C. O. Beckett  
108 Maple Heights  
New Lexington, Ohio

**I WILL TRAIN  
you at  
HOME**

**\$3500 to  
\$10,000  
a year**

# Learn to Make It in the big pay field Electricity

**DON'T** be a wage slave all your life—don't spend your best days in a miserable \$25 to \$35 a week job—pinching the pennies and barely making ends meet—when thousands of men no smarter nor luckier than you, are drawing down \$70 to \$200 every Saturday as "Cooke" Trained Electrical Experts. It's your own fault if you don't do the same. Blame yourself if your pay is small when I've made it so easy for you to learn to earn \$3,500 to \$10,000 a year in Electricity!

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I'll show you how—in your spare time—in the quiet of your own home—without losing a minute from your regular job! I'll train you in a clear, simple, easy-to-learn method—the famous and famous "Work Sheet" and "Job Ticket" Method—the same method that has landed more than 10,000 fellows like you in \$3,500 to \$10,000 a year jobs—the same method that Electrical men are praising and great Electrical concerns recommend to their employees.

## "Schooling" Not Necessary

Don't think for a minute that you need a college education or a high school diploma to become a "Cooke" Trained Big-Pay Man. You don't Mighty few of my "boys" ever went farther than grade school. But that was no drawback. With the Six Big Outfits of tools and apparatus that I furnish without extra charge, they got

simplified, practical training along work shop lines. They learned by doing—they learned thoroughly—just as if I was constantly at their elbow. And in no time at all they were experts—commanding, and getting, Big-Pay!

## Make Money While Learning

Another amazing thing about "Cooke" Training is that it pays for itself as you go along. Yea, Sir! You'll hardly have begun the Course when I'll show you how to make your spare hours count for cash! I'll show you how to get jobs—how to do the work—what to charge. And all while you're still learning. Afterwards comes the Big Job—the Big Pay—the great opportunities that will make you independent the rest of your days.

## Investigate—Mail Coupon

Don't delay! Get started! Mail coupon right now for my Big Book—the same book that has raised the pay of thousands of men—the book that will show you—yes, prove to you—why "The COOKE Trained Man is The BIG-PAY Man"—always and everywhere It's FREE—just mail coupon—at once!

**L. L. COOKE, Chief Instruction Eng.**

**L. L. COOKE SCHOOL  
OF ELECTRICITY**

**Dept. 577.**

**2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.**

**MAIL THE COUPON. Get this book free**

**L. L. COOKE, Chief Instruction Engineer,  
Dept. 577, 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Illinois**

You may send me, FREE and fully prepaid, your book "Secrets of Success in Electricity," with all particulars about your Home Study Course in Electricity.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....  
Residents of Canada send coupon to R. A. Farrow, Special Representative, 7 Medbury Lane, East, Windsor, Ont., Canada.

**no extra cost**



**The Cooke Trained Man is the "Big Pay Man"**

On sale the 7th and 20th of each month

IN THIS ISSUE

We particularly recommend to your attention three unusual short stories:

"T'ANKS, GENTLEMEN" "CRUTCH FREEMAN"

"THE HOUND OF THE MACRAES"

Why not drop us a line telling us what you think of them?

Volume XCIII

Number 5

**TWICE-A-MONTH**  
*The Popular*  
*Magazine*

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Yearly Subscription, \$4.00

Single Copies, 20 Cents

# We couldn't save a cent!



### Deep in the Rut

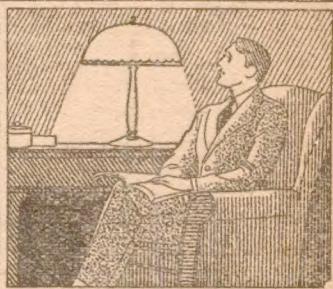
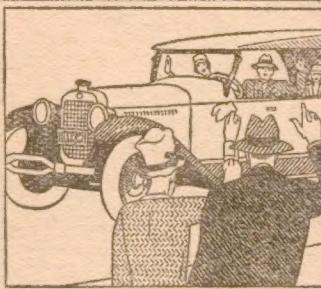
"I hadn't received a decent raise in years and my small salary scarcely lasted from week to week. Margaret did all her own housework, but the bills kept piling up and I was always afraid I'd lose my job."

### Friend Makes \$5000 a Year

"One day I had luncheon with Tom Wilson, who used to work right beside me before he took up an I. C. S. course. He told me how he was making \$5000 a year and had just bought a new home in the suburbs."

### Makes Important Resolution

"That woke me up. I told Margaret that if the International Correspondence Schools could help a man like Tom Wilson they could help me. So I decided to enroll for a course and study at home."



### Gers Raise in Salary

"That certainly was a lucky day for me. If four months I received a raise in salary and before the end of the year I was next in line for manager of my department. I'm now making more than Tom Wilson."

### Buys New Home and Car

"Thanks to the International Correspondence Schools, we're out of debt at last and putting money in the bank every week. We've got our own car now and a better home even than Tom Wilson."

### A Chance for You Too

Why don't you cut out and mail the coupon that has meant so much to so many other men? It doesn't obligate you in any way, but that one simple little act may be the means of changing your entire life. "Do-it-now!"

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS, Box 4902, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject before which I have marked X in the list below:

#### BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

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- Industrial Management
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- Coaching
- Cost Accounting

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- Illustrating
- Cartooning

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- Electric Lighting
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- Mechanical Draftsman
- Machine Shop Practice
- Railroad Positions
- Gas Engine Operating

- Civil Engineer
- Surveying and Mapping
- Mining
- Plumbing and Heating
- Steam Engineering
- Architect
- Architects' Blueprints
- Contractor and Builder
- Architectural Draftsman
- Concrete Builder
- Structural Engineer
- Chemistry
- Pharmacy
- Automobile Work
- Airplane Engines
- Agriculture
- Navigation
- Mathematics
- Radio

Name.....

Street Address.....

City.....

State.....

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

# New Self-Massaging Belt REDUCES WAIST -Easily!

Substitutes good, solid tissue for bulky, useless, disfiguring fat, yet does it so gently you hardly know it is there.

Formerly those who wished to reduce without dieting or strenuous exercise had to go to a professional masseur. His method brought about the desired reduction. But it was expensive and time-consuming, and few could take advantage of it.

#### Remarkable New Invention

At last a wonderful new invention brings this same effective method within the reach of all. The Weil Scientific Reducing Belt by means of specially prepared and scientifically fitted rubber is so constructed that as you wear it every breath you take and every movement you make imparts a constant massage to every inch of the abdomen. Working for you every second, it reduces much more rapidly than ordinary massage, saving both time and money.

#### Actually Removes Fat

It does not merely draw in your waist and make you appear thinner. It actually takes off the fat. Within a few weeks many people find 4 to 6 inches gone from the waistline, and look and feel 10 to 15 years younger.

The Weil Method of reduction is used by athletes and jockeys because it reduces quickly and preserves their strength. Highly endorsed by physicians. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.

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Write today for full description and Special 10-Day Trial Offer. The Weil Company, 4810 Hill Street, New Haven, Conn.

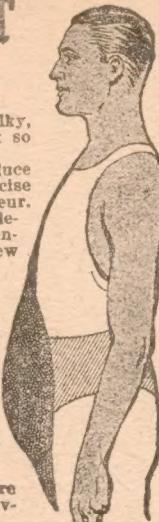
**THE WEIL COMPANY, 4810 Hill St., New Haven, Conn.**

Gentlemen: Please send me, without obligation, complete description of the Weil Scientific Reducing Belt and your special 10-Day Trial Offer.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....



## AGENTS

Women "go wild" over this smart-line of Dress Goods, Silks, Wash Fabrics, Handkerchiefs, Fancy Goods. Easy sales, big repeat trade. Liberal commissions and bonuses. Men and women, full or spare time, 1000 samples furnished. Write quickly. The National Importing Co., Dept K69-573 Broadway, N. Y. C.



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#### Amazing Price Cut on STANDARD TIRES

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Size	Tire	Tube	Tube
30x3	\$2.35	\$1.25	\$1.25
31x3	2.95	1.55	1.55
32x3	3.25	1.75	1.75
31x4	3.95	2.25	2.25
32x4	4.25	2.25	2.25
33x4	4.75	2.25	2.25
32x4 1/2	4.25	2.25	2.25
32x4 1/2	5.25	2.75	2.75
32x4 1/2	5.55	3.00	3.00
32x4 1/2	5.95	3.00	3.00
33x4 1/2	6.25	3.00	3.00

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Trade Model No. 25 corrects any ill-shaped nose which is painlessly and comfortably at home. It is the only adjustable and guaranteed patent device that will actually give you a perfect looking nose. Over 50,000 satisfied users. For years recommended by physicians, 16 years of experience in manufacturing Nose Shapers is at your service. Write today for catalog, to鼻整形外科 and free booklet, which tells you how to obtain a perfect looking nose.

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International Typewriter Ex., 186 W. Lake St. Dept. 10-Y. Chicago

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Multitudes of persons with defective hearing and deaf

Noises enjoy conversation, go to Theatres, Church because they use Leonard

Invisible Antiseptic Ear Drums. Tiny

Megaphones fitting in the ear entirely

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head piece. They are unseen comforts and inexpensive. Write for

booklet and sworn statement of the

inventor who was himself deaf.

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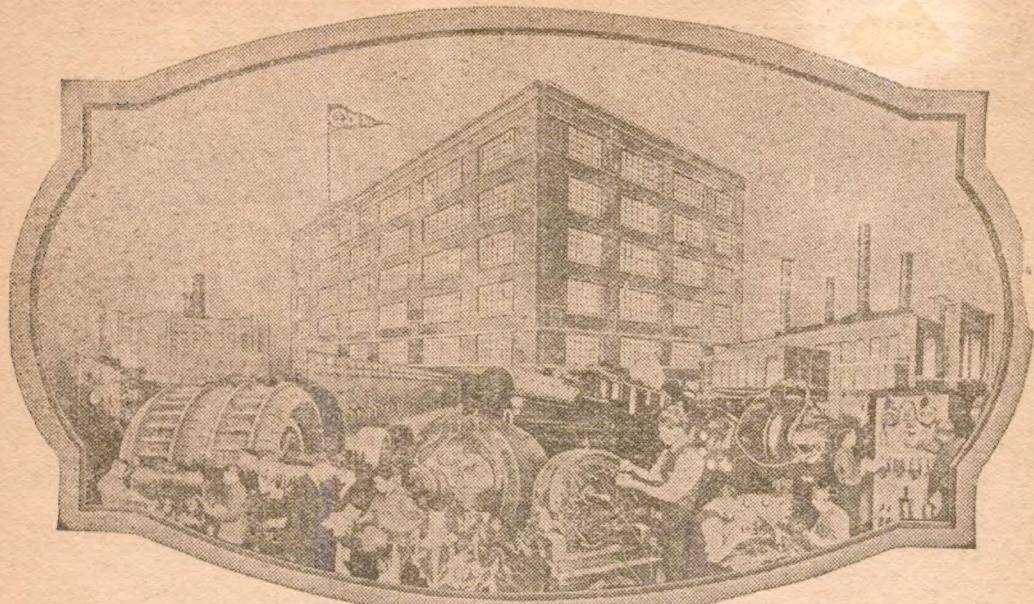
**10¢**

**THE JOWETT INSTITUTE OF PHYSICAL CULTURE**  
557 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Jowett:  
I am enclosing a copy of "The Body Builder." Please send me a copy of "The Thrill of Being Strong."

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

M-X



# Get Into ELECTRICITY

## Learn in 90 Days

On Actual  
Electrical Machinery

The whole world is open to the trained electrician. Get away from the humdrum existence in a small, dull, hopeless job, where you spend your life waiting for \$35.00 raises. Get out of the rut—get out on to the main highway of life where men do things in a big way—and where there is opportunity and big pay. Electricity opens the way for you. Learn to be an electrician (not by correspondence but

on actual electric machinery) and go anywhere you wish. You will find positions open to you in any city at salaries of \$50.00 and \$60.00 and up in electrical factories, power plants, street railway companies, railroads, contractors, etc. Select the branch of electrical work you like best and go anywhere you wish. You can also go in business for yourself with very little capital.

## NEW—Quick Amazingly Easy Method!

In my great school I have trained nearly 50,000 men. These men are making good. They were no smarter than you. They were ambitious and determined to make good.

**No Previous Experience Needed**  
You don't have to know anything at all about electricity to enter Coyne. Nor do you have to have a high school education. Many of my most successful graduates did not even complete the 8th grade in school. We have no classes. We train you on actual electrical machinery AND NOT BY CORRESPONDENCE. Our instructors are practical experts, and work with you. They tell you WHAT to do, HOW to do it, and WHY.

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In my school we start you out on simple doorbells and signals; then we pass you along to house wiring, armature winding, A. C. and D. C. motors, Dynamos, etc. You move along as fast as YOU YOURSELF are able because my training is individual with no classes.

### Earn While You Learn

Don't let lack of money stop you. If you have ambition and want to get ahead, my employment department

### Not a Correspondence School

**COYNE Electrical SCHOOL**

H. C. Lewis, Pres., Dept. 78-45 —Established 1898  
500 So. Paulina Street, Chicago



Prepare For Jobs  
Like These

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Armature Expert	\$60 a Week and up
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Radio Expert	\$70 a Week and up

ment will assist you to a part time job where you can make a good part or all of your living expenses.

### Special Offer Now

Right now I am including Radio, Electricity, Auto, Truck and Tractor electricity without extra charge.

It only costs you a two-cent stamp to get my big book of facts. Cost me a dollar to print it but it's yours FREE. It gives you all facts, about my business. I can't give you a copy of it as it shows you 150 actual photographs of how I do it. It tells you success stories of a few of my graduates. CLIP THAT COUPON TODAY, mail it to me at once and I'll send you all these facts ABSOLUTELY FREE.

### Send for Free Book!

COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL, H. C. Lewis, Pres.  
Dept. 78-45 500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Lewis: Without obligation send me your big free catalog and all details of Free Employment Service, Radio and Automotive Courses and how I can "earn while learning."

Name

Address

City

State



# Follow Him!

IMAGINE the keen thrill that would be yours following some case like this: The escaping desperado is a notorious international character with a long record. He's wanted in five countries. Rewards range from \$5000 to \$25000 for his capture. He loots a palatial mansion. Kills two men. Escapes. Disappears. Changes his entire appearance. Pulls a clever "dead" fake and is recorded as "Dead" on all police records. Dead to all records except ONE—the Inevitable Finger Print.

For ten years he deceives the world. Prosper. Becomes a social lion. And then—Bang!—the Finger Print Expert nabs him. Society is shocked. They can't believe that this social Prince is the famous Mr. "X" of criminal

fame 10 years ago. But finger prints do not lie. Never! The Finger Print Expert always wins. Glory, fame, rewards are always his.

## Thrills! Rewards! Await YOU!

Imagine the thrill, mystery, glory, fame and reward that would be yours if you were this Finger Print Expert. You can make them yours if you will. You can learn the secrets of this great science at home in your spare time. Any man of ordinary ability who can read and write can become a Finger Print Expert in a short time at a small cost.

A brilliant career and a handsome income with world-wide opportunities awaits you. Act Now. Don't let the other fellow enjoy what is rightfully yours. Mail that coupon now and learn the great things that are in store for you.

# FREE

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UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCE  
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 27-77 Chicago, Ill.  
Gentlemen:—Without any obligation whatever, send me free copy of Operator No. 38's confidential report, also your new, fully illustrated Free book on Finger Prints. Tell me all about your low prices and Easy Terms!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

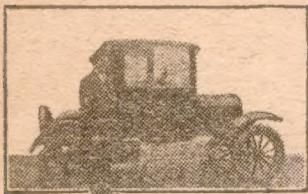
Age \_\_\_\_\_

Mail coupon now for free copy of confidential report Secret Service Operator No. 38 made to his chief. Get our big free book telling how you can become a real Finger Print Expert. Get our low prices and Easy Terms. But don't delay! Mail Coupon NOW!

PARTIAL LIST	
Graduates U. of A.	Recently appointed
State of Colorado	Finger Print Experts of these
State of Michigan	States, Cities and
Duluth, Minn.	Institutions.
Detroit, Mich.	State of Iowa
St. Paul, Minn.	State of Colorado
Minneapolis, Minn.	State of Washington
Lincoln, Nebr.	State of Michigan
Birmingham, Ala.	Duluth, Minn.
Cincinnati, Ohio	Detroit, Mich.
Havana, Cuba	St. Paul, Minn.
Calgary, Alta., Canada	St. Paul, Minn.
Pearsonola, Fla.	State of Michigan
Baltimore, Md.	St. Paul, Minn.
New Haven, Conn.	Great Falls, Mont.
Waco, Tex.	Greenville, Texas
El Paso, Texas	Albuquerque, N. M.
Everett, Wash.	Albany, N. Y. (Dairy)
Spokane, Wash.	Watertown, N. Y.
Albion, N. Y.	Walla Walla, Wash.
Albion, N. Y.	El Paso, Tex.
Livingston, Mont.	Everett, Wash.
Englewood, Mich.	Spokane, Wash.
Des Moines, Iowa	Albion, N. Y.
Fort Collins, Colo.	Livingston, Mont.
Windsor, Ont., Can.	Englewood, Mich.
Tulsa, Okla.	Des Moines, Iowa
Pueblo, Colo.	Fort Collins, Colo.
Idaho Falls, Idaho	Windsor, Ont., Can.
Lewis County, Ohio	Tulsa, Okla.
Golden, Colo.	Pueblo, Colo.
Lansing, Mich.	Idaho Falls, Idaho
Gainesville, Texas	Lewis County, Ohio
Walla Walla, Wash.	Golden, Colo.
Indiana University	Lansing, Mich.
Jeffersonville, Ind.	Gainesville, Texas
St. Joseph, Mo.	Walla Walla, Wash.
Waukesha, Wis.	Indiana University
Okmulgee, Okla.	Jeffersonville, Ind.
Hazleton, Pa.	St. Joseph, Mo.

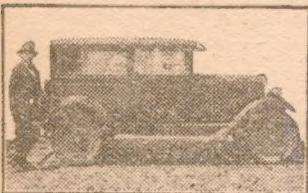
**University of Applied Science**  
1920 Sunnyside Avenue, Dept. 27-77 Chicago

# Are You Kidding Yourself Out of \$100 A YEAR?



## FORD

H. H. Cummings, Electric and Radio Engineer, California: "I have used one on my 1922 Ford, which I have driven over 50,000 miles myself. I am getting 30 miles on a gallon of gas, where before I got only 13 to 14 miles on a gallon."



## CHEVROLET

Mr. M. E. Miller, Kansas City, Mo., writes: "You people claim a saving of 25 to 50% of gasoline. I have subjected the Vaporizer to a severe and thorough test. After installing one on a Chevrolet, I found I was obtaining 43.8 miles to a gallon, whereas formerly, I had been getting only 19.6. That is not a saving of 25 to 50%, but 124%, so you see that the actual test surpasses your claim."



## BUICK

E. Henderson, Auburn, Washington, writes: "I put one of your vaporizers on my friend's Buick. We tested it out by running seventy-five miles without the vaporizer. The best the car could make was 15 miles to the gallon. With the vaporizer, we make a little better than 31 miles to the gallon."

### By Refusing to Save Gasoline This Easy Way!

MANY car owners today report that they are saving gasoline at the rate of \$100 a year. You'll agree that \$100 is worth while saving on your car this year. This is your opportunity to save it. You may save less—you may save more. I'll let you test my amazing gas device on your car at my risk. Read the remarkable facts revealed below. Then mail coupon for complete description. Also learn how you can own a sample free of cost.

Over three million car owners have now installed this remarkable little device after this free test offer. No matter what make of car you drive, I guarantee unconditionally that it will save you gasoline or you don't pay a penny.

Note the records listed on this page. These are but a few of thousands of reports from car owners all over the world, driving every make of car, under every conceivable driving condition. Forty miles per gallon from a Chevrolet, says F. S. Carroll. Forty miles on one gallon, says J. T. Jackson. Forty miles a gallon in a Dodge from Brownsville, Texas, to Tampico, Mexico, says T. L. Brown.

### What It Is

Fifteen years ago my father created what is now internationally famous as the Stransky Vaporizer. Since then it has been perfected to a remarkable point of efficiency. It is based on facts about potential gasoline power that few car owners know about. For example, official tests made by automotive authorities indicate that the average car owner wastes at least two or three gallons of gasoline for every ten he buys. This is because in most cases the driver does not have

automatic control over the mixture of gasoline and air.

### How It Works

The Stransky Vaporizer is no bigger than a dollar coin—no more expensive than a good wrench no more trouble to attach than a fan belt. Anyone can install it on the intake manifold of any car in five minutes. Its principle is to assist the vaporization of the gasoline thus creating a sharper explosion of power. Starting is not interfered with as the device shuts itself off automatically when the motor is idle.

### Make This Free Test

Test the Stransky Vaporizer on your car and expect results that will amaze you. See if you do not get exactly what many car owners have reported: doubled gas mileage, and power, no more carbon trouble, sluggish motor or fouled spark plugs. These results are guaranteed or the test costs you nothing.

H. C. Cummings mailed the coupon below. Since then he reports savings in gasoline of approximately \$385.00 cash value. Mail it now, and get full description and amazing trial offer which is even more remarkable than we can tell you here. There is no obligation whatsoever.

### J. A. Stransky Mfg. Company

M-2000 Stransky Block

PUKWANA, S. D.

### TEAR OUT AND MAIL

J. A. Stransky Mfg. Co.,  
M-2000 Stransky Block,  
Pukwana, S. D.

Without obligation to me, send full description of Stransky Vaporizer, details of free test offer, and free sample proposition.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Check here for money-making plan for representatives.

# I'll Prove that You can Make **\$100** a Week!



Yes, you can make \$100 a week. You can do as well as John Tyler, Pa., who averages \$30 to \$35 a day. You can begin like Victor Baumann, Fla., whose first 5 days' work netted him a clear profit of \$33. You don't have to risk any money. You don't need any experience. No course of training is required. You can start right in next week to enjoy a really big income. Will you let me show you how?

#### 700 MEN AND WOMEN WANTED

We are the originators and manufacturers of ZANOL Products—the nationally advertised line of Pure Foods, Toilet Preparations, Soaps, Laundry and Household Necessities—over 350 different kinds. We sell direct from factory to consumer. We have thousands of customers in every section of the U. S. Last year they bought five million dollars' worth of ZANOL Products. Now we are ready to appoint 700 more Local Representatives who will call on our customers and take care of their wants. You can have one of these easy, big-pay jobs if you act quick.

#### BIG PROFITS—EASY Work

We will assign you an exclusive territory and let you handle all our business there. We furnish you with complete equipment for doing business, and tell you just what to do. We help you get started quick and make big profits at once. You will have the same proposition that brings \$18 to \$20 a day to Mrs. Hodges, \$4 to \$5 an hour to Sanchez, \$100 or more every week to Van Allen.

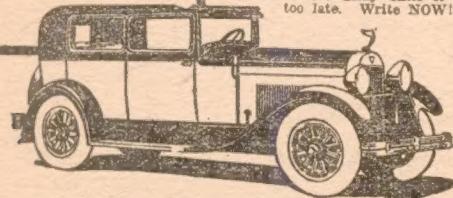
#### SEND NO MONEY

## FREE!

### HUDSON COACH

Not a contest. I offer to give you this newest model high-grade Hudson Coach without any expense to you whatever. Mail coupon for facts.

Send me your name and I will tell you how you can make \$100 a week for full time—\$8 to \$10 a day in spare time. I will show you how you can have a permanent, profitable, dignified business that will bring you a bigger income than you ever thought possible. So act at once. Don't wait until someone else gets in ahead of you. Don't delay until it is too late. Write NOW!



## Mail This NOW

Albert Mills, Pres., American Products Co., 665 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Please send me, without cost or obligation, details of your new plan by means of which I can make from \$50 to \$100 a week.

Name .....

Address .....

© A. P. Co. (Print or Write Plainly)

Please mention this magazine

**Buy for Less  
this Easy Way**

Charge it  
By Mail

Sent \$100  
C. O. D.  
TO PAY

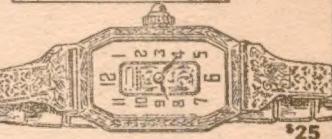
**How To Order**  
Send \$1 with order and your choice comes to you prepaid no C. O. D. on arrival.  
**10 Days Free Trial**  
After examination and 10 days free trial, pay balance in 12 equal monthly payments.

**A Full Year to Pay**  
No interest. No extras. All transaction strictly confidential. You take no risk—satisfaction absolutely guaranteed or money back.

**10 Days FREE TRIAL**



CC1 \$37.50  
Exquisitely hand engraved and plated 14K Solid White Gold lady's ring. Finest quality, genuine blue white diamond. \$3.24 a month.



CC2 - The "Princess Pat". 14-K SOLID WHITE GOLD, engraved case. Accurate, dependable. 15 jewel movement. Genuine "WRISTACRAT" flexible bracelet, \$2.00 a month.

CC3 - Nationally advertised, Elgin or Waltham, gentleman's strap watch. Hand-some engraved. Green or White Gold filled case. Warrented 20 years. Radium dial, accurate and dependable. Specially priced, \$2.12 a mo.

CC4 Dazzling cluster of 7 perfectly matched, finest quality blue white diamonds, 14K Solid White Gold mounting. \$48.50

ESTABLISHED 1895  
**ROYAL DIAMOND & WATCH CO.**  
ADDRESS DEPT. 52-K 170 BROADWAY, N.Y.

## NO JOKE TO BE DEAF

—Every Deaf Person Knows That I make myself hear, after being deaf for 25 years, with these Artificial Ear Drums. I wear them day and night, which makes all noise and ringing ears. They are perfectly comfortable. No one sees them. Write me and tell me your trouble, how I got deaf and how I make you hear. Address: GEO. P. WAY, Artificial Ear Drum Co. (Inc.) 150 Hoffman Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

## Frank Facts FREE to Men Past 40

A WELL KNOWN American scientist has discovered a new safe way to treat prostate gland failure. A wholly new method—a new drugless hygiene. 40,000 test cases. Endorsed by physicians. Often restores prostate gland to healthful activity in ten days. Unconditionally guaranteed. Write for scientist's FREE book, illustrated and copyrighted. No obligation. Address W. J. Kirk, 7610 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.

when answering advertisements

# LEARN AUTO'S

*New  
Easy  
Way  
to*

**Earn UP  
TO  
\$100 a Week**

Say goodbye to low pay. Get into the Auto Business, where big pay—extramoney—raises come quick! A brilliant future awaits you in the World's Biggest Business. If you're earning a cent less than \$60 a week, clip that coupon. Learn how \$50—\$75—even \$100 a week is possible for you now! Find out about this training which boosted Yancy of Perla, Ark., from \$30 a week up to \$90!

## Open Your Own Auto Shop

My Free Book tells how men make extra money while training, and then go into business with no further Capital. It's the training that counts, and it is complete training that I give you.

## Common Schooling

### All You Need

Men between 15 and 60, with very little education, are becoming Garage Owners, Superintendents, Foremen. Whether you have had years of Auto Experience, or never touched a car before, send for this Free Book Now. I'll show you the quick way to get in line for real success in the Auto Business.

**AVIATION  
COURSE**  
and many other valuable features included  
**FREE** of any extra  
charge to you  
**NOW, if you  
act QUICK!**  
Mail coupon below today!

**Money-Back  
Agreement**  
My Money-Back  
Agreement gives you  
absolute protection.  
You must be  
satisfied or  
"Job-Way"  
Training costs  
you nothing.

**MAIL THIS COUPON**

## FREE Auto Book!

B. W. COOKE, Directing Engineer,  
Chicago Motor Training Corporation,  
Dept. 17-77186 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago, Ill.  
Send me your Book, "Auto Facts", Free of charge.  
Also full particulars of your Aviation Course offer  
and of "JOB-WAY" Training. This obligates me  
in no way whatever.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

**AT  
HOME!**

Send coupon for Free Auto Book. See how I train you right at home, in every branch of Auto work—Learn how I prepare you, quickly and easily, for the Big Jobs, paying up to \$100 a week, and more. "Job-Way" Training includes all Mechanical and Electrical work—Starting, Lighting, Ignition—also Welding, Brazing, Vulcanizing—everything you need to get in line for a big pay Job as an Electrical and Mechanical Auto Expert.

## I'll Help You Get a Good Job

My Employment Department will help you get a good Job whenever you want one. You don't have to wait until you have graduated to use this service. No sir, as soon as you have shown that you know enough about Autos to hold the Job I'll give you this help whenever you ask for it! What is more, you can use it as long as you live!

## Get All the Facts!

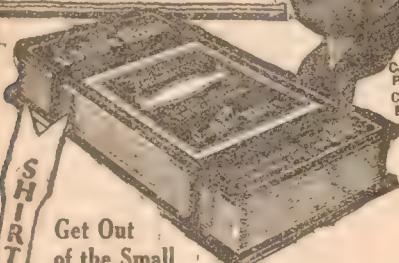
Send for my new Free Book now! See what "Job-Way" has done for hundreds. See what it can do for you. Learn all about my legal money-back agreement—and the many added features. Clip coupon now!

**B. W. COOKE** Directing Engineer

Dept. 17-77  
Chicago Motor Training Corp.,  
1916 Sunnyside Ave., CHICAGO

I Offer You  
\$100.00  
A WEEK

Be Your Own Boss  
Full Time or Spare Time



C. E. Mandel  
President  
Carlton  
Mills, Inc.

Get Out  
of the Small  
Pay Ranks... If You'll Put this Free Men's  
Furnishing Line in Your Pocket You're  
Good for \$100 a Week—Every Week

—  
Experience  
Unnecc-  
sary  
—  
No Capital  
Required  
—

Men and Women by the Hundreds earn  
this worthwhile amount. Many  
earn more!

We manufacture the famous and 100% com-  
plete Carlton Custom-Quality Line of Men's  
shirts, to which has been added equally Wear-  
able ranges of Neckwear and Underwear.

#### WHAT AN OPPORTUNITY!

Through you, we reach an ever new American  
market of 35,000,000 prospects.

No experience is necessary... all you  
have to do is show our dis-lux Sample Book  
pictured above—quote our low prices and take  
orders without effort. We deliver, collect and  
guarantee satisfaction. You are paid in cash  
daily. To those who are ambitious, we pay,  
besides their big earnings, extra cash bonuses,  
and a share in profits.

Compact Sales Kit furnished free—goes in  
your pocket like the \$100.00 a week—so that  
you can conduct your business easily, with  
dignity, and make more money in less time  
with least effort.

#### ACT AT ONCE!

Join the outstanding successful company in the  
Direct Selling Field. This is the greatest  
opportunity for you to be assured of a pros-  
perous present and a protected future. Mail  
coupon!

Carlton Mills, Inc.  
114 Fifth Ave., New York

MAIL COUPON  
TO-DAY!

Step Into The  
Big Pay Field!

Carl E. Mandel, President  
Carlton Mills, Inc., 114 Fifth Avenue, New York

DEPT. 73R

Dear Mr. Mandel: Send complete free Sample Outfit of  
Carlton Line. Your big money guarantee arouses my  
ambitions. I'm ready for that \$100 a week—weekly!

Full Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Start at Once

Cash In Advance

Year 'Round Steady  
Big Income



Bald Men Look!  
FREE  
One Full Ampoule of my amazing hair  
fluid which I discovered myself and  
which grew hair on my head. This ampoule is absolutely free. Don't send any  
money. There is No C. O. D. No charge  
whatsoever. All I want is an opportunity  
to show you how easily I grew hair on my  
own and hundreds of other men's heads.

Here is  
How I  
Looked  
When  
I was Bald



I was just as bald as this photo shows  
—But I grew my own hair with my won-  
derful fluid. I can grow your hair too.

#### Bald Men Grow Hair Quick!

What I accomplished on my own head and other heads I can do for you  
provided you are under 40 years of age and not of hair that has not caused  
by burns or scars. Anyhow, I must enclose as you pay nothing. No  
expenses. My home treatment is simple, quick, inexpensive.

#### WRITE FOR FREE AMPOLLE

Write today. I will send you immediately one full ampoule of my won-  
derful fluid which I discovered myself. By the secret and which  
grew my own hair on my own head bald. Besides the free Ampoule of  
Fluid, I will send photographs, names and addresses of men and women  
who successfully used my Wonder Fluid for Baldness. Pulling hair and  
particularly for Baldness. Write for free Ampoule.

**VREELANDS** — 2777 EUCLID-WINDSOR  
BLDG., CLEVELAND, OHIO

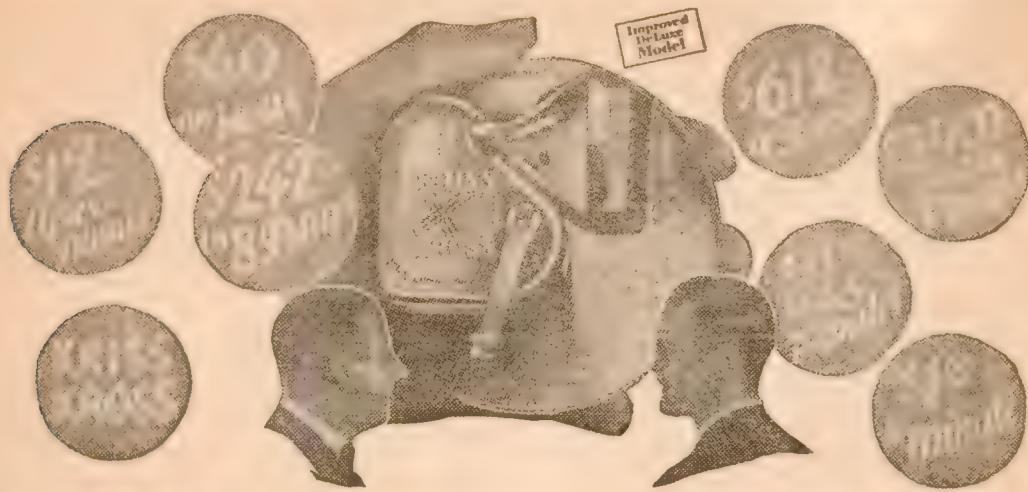


Both  
Given  
Hawaiian  
Banjo  
Uke  
Big  
Phonograph

Most wonderful new Banjo Uke and the up-to-date phonograph.  
Either one given for selling 12 boxes famous WHITE CLOVERLINE  
SAC-18 at 25¢ each. Beautiful art picture FREE with each hex. and  
remitting as per plan in catalog. Send no money, we trust you.  
Write quick. Our 82nd year. We are reliable. Be first in your town.  
THE WILSON CHEMICAL CO. Dept. 75H TYRONE, PA.

#### I Want 700 Agents at \$90 a Week!

Men and Women! Write me today and by  
this time next week I can place you in a position to  
make \$2.00 to \$5.00 an hour in your spare time, up to  
\$15 a day full time. Thousands of our repre-  
sentatives are making that and more. Our  
Newspaper Advertising, Catalogs, take orders  
for famous World's Star Millinery, Under-  
wear and Rayon Lingerie sold direct  
from Mill to Home—a complete line for  
whole family. Permanent customers and  
repeat orders. No investment needed.  
Complete selling equipment furnished  
Free, No C.O.D. No deposit.  
It's a chance to make thou-  
sands of dollars. Exclusive territory. Extra Serv-  
ice Awards. Cash Bonus. Promotion. No ex-  
pense needed. Write today for all particulars.  
**WORLD'S STAR KNITTING COMPANY**  
660 Lake Street Bay City, Mich.



# HOW I Discovered the Secret of Making \$7500 a Year and More!

Here are Some Amazing Inside Facts About Success—As Discovered by a Man Who Has TRIPLED His Former Earnings in 3 Short Months! Read This Interesting Message Without Fail!

By N. C. Paige—Star Salesman After 3 Months' Experience

\$104 in 3 days! \$80 an hour! \$7,500 to \$10,000 a year!

Those are figures I was only dreaming about a few months ago. But today they are chalked up in black and white on my sales record, and, what is more important, in my bank book! And yet, to be frank, only a small part of the credit is due me. Anybody with average ability can do exactly the same.

## Where the Big Money Is

Take my own case, for example. Before I "came to," I tried nine different ways of earning money. They all sounded good, solid, substantial and difficult. The more they looked, the bigger I thought the possibilities must be. None of my propositions panned out, and I hardly made enough to keep going. Then I discovered KRISS-KROSS.

The day I read about this amazing shaving device in Liberty Magazine was certainly a red-letter day for me! Here's what I saw:

## I'll Guarantee to Keep You in Keen Razor Blades for Life

"Think of it! 365 keen, cool shaves a year from the same blade. That's what KRISS-KROSS is doing for American shavers everywhere!"

"This amazing invention marks such a radical advance in shaving comfort and economy that it deserves to be called a blade rejuvenator."

"KRISS-KROSS strips your blade (any make) on the diagonal just like a master barber. Pressure decreases automatically.

Nickel Jig flies up to notify you when your blade is ready.

"And now for my smashing offer! To introduce a KRISS-KROSS stropper I will give you an amazing new kind of razor free. Ready 3 razors in one. Can be made straight or T-shape in a Jiffy. Comes with 5 special blades."

Naturally, I was vitally interested because cool, slick, painless shaves are what every man tries to get and usually can't! And then at the bottom of the ad I saw a little square:

"Agents: Make big money as a KRISS-KROSS representative—\$75 to \$225 a week. Mr. King made \$60 in one day. J. C. Kellogg made \$200 in 7 days."

## First Step to Success!

At first I was skeptical about the money-making part of it. But the stropper sounded so extraordinary that I sent for it. When it came, I saw it was even more astonishing than I had imagined. I took it over to show a friend and in less than 5 minutes he asked me to get him one. While we were talking, two more friends dropped in and made the same request. When I left, I had nearly \$5 cash profit in my pocket—money I had not made one single effort to get!

I saw my chance and grabbed it! The KRISS-KROSS people gave me exclusive territory, a wonderful lot of sales helps and a big, illustrated salesmanship course book that contained selling secrets worth \$100 cold cash to me! My first week I made \$180! The next 3 days I made \$104. Just think of it! It didn't seem to take any effort. The orders rolled in like water over a waterfall!

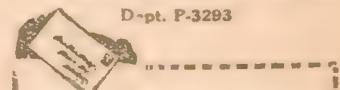
Mr. Paige's experience is typical of that of hundreds of KRISS-KROSS representatives. Practically every man who takes up this astonishing proposition writes us that he is making money faster and easier than he ever dreamed possible. Right now more KRISS-KROSS representatives and agents are wanted—to earn \$30 a day and up. Find out about it today! Clip the coupon and mail it at once! You'll never regret it. Mr. Paige didn't! Be act at once!

## Rhodes Manufacturing Co.

Makers of KRISS-KROSS

1418 Pendleton Ave. St. Louis, Mo.

D-pt. P-3293



Rhodes Mfg. Co., Dept. P-3223  
1413 Pendleton Ave.  
St. Louis, Mo.

Please send me full details of your amazing KRISS-KROSS Stropper with list of generous commissions, and tell me how I can make big profits with it in my full or spare time.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....



EARLE LIEDERMAN - The Muscle Builder  
Author of "Muscle Building," "Science of Wrestling," "Secrets of Strength," "Here's Health," "Endurance," etc.

## HOW STRONG ARE YOU? Can You Do These Things?

Lift 200 lbs. or more overhead with one arm; bend and break a horseshoe; tear two decks of playing cards; bend spikes; chin yourself with one hand.

CAN you do any of them? I can and many of my pupils can. It is remarkable the things a man really can do if he will make up his mind to be strong. I have taken men who were ridiculed because of their frail make-up and developed them into the strongest men of their locality.

### I WANT YOU FOR 90 DAYS

These are the days that call for speed. In olden days it took years to develop a strong, healthy body. I can completely transform you in 90 days. Yes, make a complete change in your entire physical make-up. In 30 days I guarantee to increase your biceps one full inch. I also guarantee to increase your chest two inches. But I don't quit there. I don't stop till you're a finished athlete—a real strong man. I will broaden your shoulders, deepen your chest, strengthen your neck. I will give you the arms and legs of a Hercules. I will put an armor plate of muscle over your entire body. But with it come the strong, powerful lungs which enrich the blood, putting new life into your entire being. You will be bursting over with strength, power and vitality.

### A DOCTOR WHO TAKES HIS OWN MEDICINE

Many say that any form of exercise is good, but this is not true. I have seen men working in the factories and mills who literally killed themselves with exercise. They ruined their hearts or other vital organs, ruptured themselves or killed off what little vitality they possessed.

I was a frail, weakling myself, in search of health and strength. I spent years in study and research, analyzing my own defects to find what I needed. After many tests and experiments, I discovered a secret of progressive exercising. I increased my own arms over six and a half inches, my neck three inches and other parts of my body in proportion. I decided to become a public benefactor and impart this knowledge to others. Physicians and the highest authorities on physical culture have tested my system and pronounced it to be the surest means of acquiring perfect manhood. Do you crave a strong, well-proportioned body and the abundance of health that goes with it? Are you true to yourself? If so, spend a pleasant half-hour in learning how to attain it. The knowledge is yours for the asking.

Send for My New 64-page Book

### "MUSCULAR DEVELOPMENT"

IT IS FREE—Don't Send One Penny—Your name and address on a postal will do. It contains forty-eight full-page photographs of myself and some of the many prize-winning pupils I have trained. Some of these came to me as pitiful weaklings, inspiring me to help them. Look them over and marvel. This book will prove a real inspiration to you. For the sake of your future health and happiness do not put it off. Send today—right now before you turn this page.

EARLE LIEDERMAN, 305 Broadway, Dept. 3010, New York City

Earle Li Liederman, Dept. 3010 305 Broadway, New York City  
Dear Sir: Please send me, absolutely FREE and without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development."

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please write or print plainly)

# What Made His Hair Grow?

Read His Letter for the Answer



"Two years ago I was bald all over the top of my head. I felt ashamed for people to see my head. I tried different preparations, but they did no good. I remained bald, until I used KOTALKO.

"New hair came almost immediately and kept on growing. In a short time I had a splendid head of hair, which has been perfect ever since—and no return of the baldness."

This verified statement is by Mr. H. A. Wild. He is but one of the big legion of users of KOTALKO who voluntarily attest it has stopped falling hair, eliminated dandruff or aided new, luxuriant hair growth. KOTALKO is sold by busy druggists everywhere.

## FREE Trial Box

To prove the efficacy of KOTALKO, for men's, women's and children's hair, the producers are giving Proof Boxes. Address: KOTALKO COMPANY, L-26, Station 6, New York, N.Y. Please send me FREE Proof Box of KOTALKO.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

## 10,000 Women Near You Want This

"Fashion the  
Foot like a  
Hollow"

### Agents!

### MAKE \$90 A WEEK EASY

Something new, just out, a whirlwind seller—the amazing Kristee Comfort-Foot-Mat. Great need & want of the age. Rests all feet, relieves strains and aches and what weight from doing dishes, cooking, etc. Made of durable, soft, velvety pure sponge rubber. Women everywhere welcome with open arms and buy on sight! Simply show it and take orders.

**FREE OUTFIT** Everything needed to start right out making money given Free. No experience needed. We show you. Send for Catalogue and 47 other Quality Rubber Products Direct from Akron, the Rubber City. Write us for FREE Outfit and all particulars. KRISTEE MANUFACTURING CO., 970 Erie St., Akron, Ohio

## I'll Pay Your Bills

and give you a steady income for the rest of your life, if you'll take care of my business in your locality. No experience needed. Full or spare time. You don't invest one cent, just be my local partner. Make \$15.00 a day easy. Ride in a Chrysler Sedan I furnish and distribute teas, coffees, spices, extracts, things people eat. I furnish everything including world's finest super sales outfit containing 32 full size packages of highest quality products. Lowest prices. Big, permanent repeat business. Quality guaranteed by \$25,000.00 bond. With person I select as my partner, I go 50-50. Get my amazing offer for your locality. Write or Wire.

C. W. VAN de MARK, Dept. 1092-KK  
117 Duane St., Cincinnati, O.  
Copyright, 1928, by The Health-O Quality Products Co.

Please mention this magazine

when answering advertisements



**SALES MEN AND AGENTS  
WANTED!**

# *Scientist's Amazing Discovery* **Makes Old Cars Like New!**

**Goodbye, Shabby Old Cars!** New and Amazing Discovery Brings Back Original Finishes Like Magic! Easy to Apply—Just Flow It On! Lasts Indefinitely! Sells Like

Wildfire Netting Agents as High as \$25 a Day and Better! Right Now the Inventor Will Send You FULL-SIZE Sample at His Own Risk! See Coupon Below.

## **MAKE \$150 A WEEK...AND MORE!**

**H**ERE is an astonishing new liquid discovery that restores show-room lustre and color to old cars—and adds 100% to their appearance in a single hour, yet actually costs less than a good inner tube! Nothing like it has ever been known before. It is not a wax—not a polish—not a paint—not a cleaner! It is simply a transparent liquid that possesses the mysterious power of rejuvenating original color and producing a mirror-like gloss at the same time. It LASTS, TOO—for month after month!

So surprising and amazingly successful is this remarkable discovery (called NAVON) that salesmen all over the country are piling up big, liberal commissions for just a few hours' work. J. Porter (Wisc.) took in \$98 in a single day. And H. Geiss (Ill.) made \$300 in one week just showing it to motorists and friends.

### **Easy To Apply!**

NAVON comes in a handy container ready for instant use. Just put it on the car as it comes out of the can, rubbing it in with a piece of cheese cloth. No fussing with brushes or time-consuming rubbing. It flows smooth and dries without streaks. No experience necessary to get perfect

results. Dozens of enthusiastic users write that it is "easy as washing a car"—and "not half the trouble of waxing."

And not only that. NAVON is guaranteed harmless and safe. Contains no acids, benzol, or other injurious substance. Acts both as a protection and preservative. Fine for metal, leather and wood.

### **Sensational Money-Getter!**

Nothing offered to the auto public has ever made such an instant hit as NAVON. 9 out of 10 motorists want it on sight. Agents and demonstrators pocketins surprising profits—up to \$150 and \$300 a week. Even spare-time workers are making \$10 to \$15 an evening or Sat. afternoons just showing NAVON to friends, neighbors, etc.

Be the NAVON representative in your locality—and get your share of the profits that are awaiting. Work only a few months in operating a Service Station—from \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year. NAVONizing cars for people in your town. You can start right away in your own garage—or rent one, clearing as high as \$65 a day.

**SEND FOR DETAILS** and our 14 Tested Money-Making plans—together with a TRIAL OFFER that allows you to test NAVON on your own car without a penny's risk! No obligation. Mail the coupon today!

### **READ**

*what users say of this amazing discovery*

#### **"SURPRISED!"**

"I refinshed my 1928 Ford with NAVON and it looks as good as the day I bought it. I am surprised at the results and so is everybody else." W. A. Burge, Miss.

#### **"GREAT!"**

"NAVON certainly exceeded my expectations. I think it is great and so do my friends. I am going to start a NAVON Service Station and have already secured a garage." Geo Kelley, Pa.

**Censolidaed Specialties Corp., Dept. 90-R  
21 W. Elm St., Chicago, Ill.**

Without obligation, send me your No-Risk TRIAL OFFER together with special Money-Making proposition on NAVON.

Name .....

Address .....

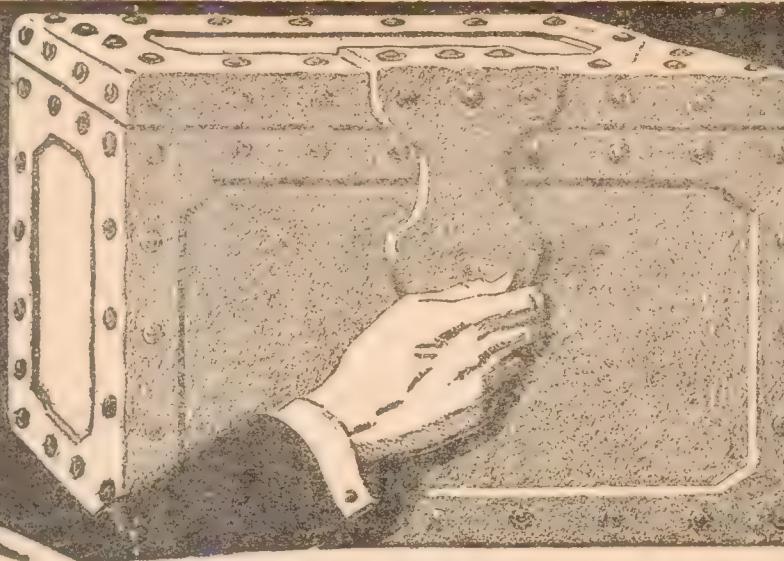
Town .....

State .....

**NAVON**  
INSTANT REFINISH  
FOR ALL SURFACES  
CONSOLIDATED SPECIALTIES CORP., Dept. 90-R  
21 W. ELM ST. CHICAGO, ILL.

Please mention this

magazine when answering advertisements



# Unlocking For You the Age-Old Secrets of Magic

Baffling secrets of the world's greatest magicians—mysteries never before divulged—supernatural effects of the Orient—massive stage illusions—the most priceless, most treasured Secrets of the Magic Profession now—for the first time—disclosed to YOU in the great Tarbell Course in Magic. Learn to perform like a real magician in a short time—in your spare time—at home. Be the life of every party—the center of every crowd, wherever you go. Business and social success are YOURS when you know Magic. And it's EASY with the Tarbell System!

**Astonish Your Friends      Earn \$350 to \$1000  
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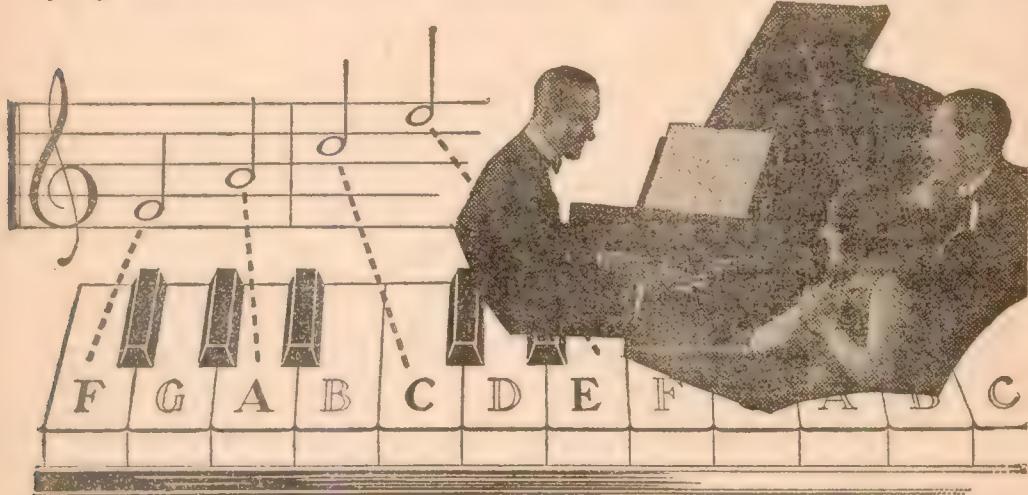
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# The Popular Magazine

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No. 5



## A MAN *of the* BORDER

By

Holman Day

*Who wrote "After the Verdict."*

Matt Gaylord, chief of the border patrol, tackles a ring of narcotic smugglers.

### CHAPTER I.

#### DEATH ON THE BORDER.

THEY "nailed" Jad Kerwin in Castol Pass, a rocky byway leading south from Canada into the States. At dawn a fire warden trudged through the pass, heading for the height of land from which he might make a general survey.

The season was May before the undergrowth had put forth moist new leaves to minimize fire hazards in the drying duff. From where he had camped in the night the warden sniffed the pervasive scent of wood smoke; he

was anxious to get on high land in order to locate a danger spot.

Climbing the narrow trail over the ledges, he came upon a puddle of blood cupped in a narrow, shallow depression. The baleful pool told of recent tragedy. A crumpled hat gave its casual testimony that the victim was a man.

The warden, studying the signs, guessed that the body had been tossed from the rocky shelf, down over the cliff. At the foot of the scarp something, so he perceived, had smashed through the tangle of undergrowth; the observer saw broken branches and little hemlocks that had been mowed flat.

He worked his way down the cliff and found the body of Jad Kerwin. Recognition by the fire warden was easy and instant, though the man was not in uniform. Kerwin was one of the ranger patrol of the region, a detail from officers paid by the State—one of a half dozen deputies who were headed by Matt Gaylord.

Therefore, the warden proceeded to get in touch with Gaylord at the patrol headquarters camp. As a fire warden he had means for such communication and was able to make fairly quick work of it. In this case he could attend to his own business at the same time. He climbed back to the trail, mounted to the height of land and rigged up his portable heliograph.

He looked after his own business first. A fire was alive at the edge of Margass Heath, a dozen miles or so to the west. But Jad Kerwin was as dead as he ever would be.

The warden got the range of the Tomhigh station and winked his helio persistently, until he finally caught the eye of the station man and was answered. Although the sun was barely topping the eastern mountains, the warden's first dots and dashes damned the man at the station for staying asleep all day. This was a touch of rough-and-ready humor; tragedy had not dulled the warden's relish for a joke.

Then the Margass fire was reported and the Tomhigh man was ordered to telephone for a dozen men to march from the nearest hamlet. The warden took time to state that the fire was not dangerous but might become so later in the day if the regular afternoon wind should get under it and sweep it into the blackgrowth. A hand-smutched code book shortened the message to laconic brevity.

The warden lighted his pipe and waited, giving the station man abundant time to do his telephoning; the fire fighters must be started at once because

they would have a long tramp of it to Margass from any settlement where men could be secured.

An "O. K." was flashed from the station, an assurance that the men had been notified and were on their way.

Then the fire patrolman twirled his little crank and winked off what he knew about the case of Jad Kerwin. It was easy to relay succinct directions to Matt Gaylord; he would find a pool of blood in Castol Pass, there was a hole in the bush mass at the foot of the cliff, and at the end of the little tunnel through brush lay Jad.

And then the fire warden, having finished matters of current business knocked the ashes out of his pipe and went on his way. It was his affair to scout for fires in the dangerous time, not to post himself as a watcher over a dead man—so ran his opinion.

At the patrol headquarters camp the chief pushed away from the breakfast table to answer the telephone. He listened, came back and seated himself.

Soberly, without display of emotion, he said to Kenny Gage, fellow patrolman, closest friend and sole companion in headquarters at that juncture:

"They've got Jad. Castol Pass, last night."

Gage banged his fist on the table.

"I say it's hell what we're up against!"

"Yep," admitted Matt serenely. He stirred his coffee and returned Gage's blazing stare with placid intentness.

The latter barked angrily:

"I'm telling you all over again I'm going to jack the job."

"But it isn't because you're afraid, buddy. There can't be any argument between you and me on that point."

Gage grew restive under his friend's long stare and lowered his eyes to his plate.

"What's the use?" he grumbled. "A few of us stuck along this border, trying

to fight a million-dollar syndicate and its hired gunmen. And not getting much more pay than Polack ax heavers! And look a here, Matt, don't be boring me any more with that gimlet stare of yours. What's the use, I ask you again? As I figure it, a few of us are planted up here only to make a show. And then the newspapers and the goody-goodies can spout about how the law is all so brave in guarding the border against the renegades. It's up to the Federal government to stop this thing if the high-ups really want it stopped. I don't believe in us State chaps butting in."

"We're ordered to help. And that's another thing I won't argue with you about, good friend. Our duty!"

Gage kicked away from the table and snapped to his feet.

"This duty stuff has got to be handled with a little common sense."

"Depending on what spigot you draw common sense from, buddy."

"Whadda yeh mean?" It was a rather truculent demand.

"I'm going to tell you what I mean Ken, and I won't be mealy-mouthed, considering the kind of friends we are. They got poor old Jad with hot lead. They're trying to get you in another way. Me, too, for that matter."

"They'll get *you* with lead, Matt," insisted the other. "They know blasted well they can't get you any other way."

Gaylord was equally positive.

"They won't try bullets, not on *me*—at any rate, not right away. This killing of Jad is going to stir up a lot o' row. If they do the same thing to me—I say, Ken, don't be taking what I say as bragging or putting too big a price tag on myself—but if they use their bullets on *me* it'll raise merry hell here."

"I believe that much myself," sourly acknowledged Gage. "Our big boss has medaled you as his squarest shooter in the game. If you get snuffed he'll simply have to make a big play."

"So big a one," agreed Matt, with a deprecatory grin, "that all the rat holes will be plugged and a lot o' sulphur burned. He'll raid the State treasury to pay for an extra job—and that means the gang will be put out of business in these parts. At least till the bouquets wilt on my grave." He rose. "Put out your hand, buddy!"

Gage obeyed and the two held the clasp for some moments.

"Ken, they can't get me with cash—they won't be trying to get me with lead right soon. The game is worth too much for 'em just now. But as your best friend I've got the right to say I'm worried about you, pard. It's the way you've been talking lately. Every day you're damning the job. You don't tell me you've got a better one in sight. If you have, why, then you go to it with my blessing. But if anybody is weakening your grit and your grip on this one you're holding down, by the blue gods, I'm going to stand between you and the sneaks who are after you!"

Kenny stiffened in his muscles, tilted up his chin and yanked his hand from Matt's grasp.

"If anybody but you hinted I'm getting ready to sell out, I'd take it for fighting talk."

"Well, go ahead and take what I've said for fighting talk, buddy. But don't fight your best friend. Fight the rabs who are trying to get you into their hellishness."

"How do you know they're trying?"

"If you'll look me in the eye as a friend and tell me they ain't, I'll take your word, without oath, Ken."

But Gage turned and walked toward the door.

"You know well enough every one of us had an offer," he growled. "I ain't saying I'm taking up with 'em. But I will say I've gone damnation sour, and this killing of Jad just about curdles the mess."

"Jad is gone and it's sure dirty to

say one mean word about him, Ken. But he was one you couldn't pound sense into. In spite of all my warnings, he was bound and determined to go off on lone hunts, sniping. Out of uniform, too. He did kill off a few of 'em, I'll admit, but that was only pancake stuff, dealing with such a gang. They can hire two more gunmen for every one they lose. They have played his own game and they got him. I'm sorry, but he paid no attention to my orders and warnings."

"We can't *kill* 'em off—we can't *scare* 'em off. Well, what the hell can we do to put a dent into the game?" demanded Gage, with skeptical bitterness.

"First of all, stick to the job as it's laid out for us. Stick to the outside and burrow till we find a way to get at the inside. Then bust the main motor."

Gage swung about in the doorway. Hopefully he suggested, but with the manner of one concealing a real motive:

"Suppose you make me an undercover man and let me go into the gang? I'll swear to 'em I've quit the service."

Matt shook his head decisively.

"If I should put prussic acid into your next meal, it would be more friendly because it would be quicker. In the first place, snooping under a lie is too dirty business for my best friend to be in. Second, you're not slick enough for that kind of work. They're wise and would nail you in no time. Two Federal undercover men have already been done for, and you know it. Last of all, it isn't my style of fighting anybody. They're low-down devils, but I pass up the lying, sneaking style o' pusseyfoot stuff, even in their case. Ken, you're going to stick with me and play fair. No other way!"

The other grunted and walked into the sunshine.

Matt looked after the friend, eyes narrowed under furrowed brows. It was the aspect of one who was wrestling with dubiety.

Both were young, stalwart, personable, commendable types of woodsmen. But in Gaylord's countenance was a finer shading of integrity unassailable. His outthrust jaw signified much to a reader of physiognomy.

After a few moments of pondering, he shook himself into action. He strode off on the trail of Gage.

"We have been gabbing too long, buddy. There's poor Jad to be fetched out."

The two men saddled their horses and rode at a canter till they came to the foot of Castol Pass. There they dismounted and led the nags up along the bottom of the gorge, beating through the undergrowth or wading in the stream when the shore was impassable.

They did not climb to hunt for the blood pool. The finding of Kerwin's body was simplified; the horses scented the victim in the undergrowth and snorted their alarm. With camp axes Matt and Kenny cut saplings and made a rude litter. On this they lashed the body with ropes, after they had made a winding sheet of their saddle blankets.

With other ropes they slung the litter between the horses in a tandem rig. The bushes in the narrow defile would not permit the animals to travel abreast.

The two men did not talk while they were at work. Gage was mentally disturbed and showed it. He kept glancing at Gaylord's visage and found it expressionless. This composure irritated the companion and he spoke out sharply when Matt was making his final inspection of the rig before starting.

"It's an awful thing, losing a mate this way, Matt! I'll be cursed if you're not taking it cool enough!"

Matt gazed at his friend across the body on the litter.

"Would it suit you better if I should lay my hand on Jad and swear to get the gang that did this to him? I believe that's done in some of those Northwest stories I've seen you reading.

Maybe it would ease my feelings quite a bit. But I've never learned how to ease my feelings by talking, buddy. Not even about what I'm going to do. I guess all I can say right now about Jad's case is that it's giving me more grit and muscle to grip things up this way. And I was a bit disappointed in you, Kenny, when you said you were minded to jack the job on account of this thing."

"But what is it getting you, this job?"

Matt walked to the lead horse and laid a hand on the bridle.

"Sworn officers had better not stop to figure profit and loss. If you and I some time get to be partners in a grocery store, or anything of the sort, we'll have to do figuring. Till then we won't wear out tongues or lead pencils."

He pulled on the bridle rein and clucked to the horse.

Gage, muttering, walked beside the bier, steadyng it.

## CHAPTER II.

### SUSPICION.

BEYOND the mouth of the Castol defile a tote road afforded level going, and Gaylord and Gage mounted their horses. The men rode slowly, in silence.

They met up with a stranger on the road. He wore hip rubber boots, carried a wicker creel, side slung, and was using for a staff his rod, unjointed and cased. The band of his slouch hat was adorned with fishing flies.

Matt glanced at the obtrusive flies and his lips twisted with a bit of a grin. In this equipment for early May brook fishing, he was detecting the ignorance of an amateur, or the device of a fraud fisherman who was anxious to advertise himself as an innocent sportsman. Matt, always alert in suspicions of strangers, was inclined to the latter opinion after a quick sizing up of the come-by-chance. Therefore, the smile was fugitive and the patrolman's face became grimly creased.

The man halted in the middle of the road, blocking the way. The horses stopped of their own accord.

"Oh, I say! You do look glum," averred the man, staring at Matt's visage. Then he shifted his gaze to the bodeful burden on the litter. "Are you carrying out a dead man? My gracious, what has happened?" In his speech he ran up and down the scale, singsong fashion.

"Can't guess, can you?" Matt demanded stiffly. His suspicion was more alertly in arms.

The man opened his eyes, perfect innocence in his demeanor.

"Of course I can't guess."

Matt tapped the handle of his crop against the chevrons on his sleeve.

"Not even when you see State patrolmen toting out a dead mate?"

The man craned his neck and again looked past the horse at the body on the litter.

"I can see that you're officers, of course. But I can't bore my eyesight through blankets to know whom you're carrying. Furthermore, I don't know anything about the woods and the running of things up here. This is all fresh and strange for me."

Again Matt made derogatory inspection of the flies looped around the hat-band.

"Yes, you're advertising that it's fresh and strange. How do you expect to toll trout with flies at this season, when flies haven't begun to drop on the water?"

"I was told to use flies, Mister Officer."

"Who told you?"

The man detected animosity in the hard eyes and sharp tone. He put away his aspect of innocence and his visage showed hard lines, too.

"Look here, officer, you act as if you're trying to put me on the witness stand."

"Maybe I am," Matt retorted. He

was going a bit far with this stranger and was aware of considerable satisfaction when the man now kicked under the spur. The officer persevered: "How do you happen to be up here, so far from a sporting camp?"

"For the sake of the hike and to find streams that haven't been fished to death. I'm stopping at Bragg's."

"Ah, um!" Matt pursed his lips. "Ten miles. I'll have to admit you do love hiking." He lifted the reins.

"But hold on a minute!" The stranger flung up his hand. "What happened to this mate of yours?"

"You can't guess that either, hey? Haven't you heard about how much hellishness is going on along this border? Have you been sitting in front of the fire at Bragg's without having gossip passed to you? Plenty of gab in these parts about gang doings!" Matt was keenly watching the man's reaction.

The stranger displayed merely indifference.

"There may have been talk, but I don't pay much attention to anything I'm not interested in. I'm up here for the fishing and nothing else. However, naturally I'm interested when I meet officers carrying out a dead man. More of the hellishness you've spoken of, I take it. But I won't pry into the matter if you're keeping it quiet."

"No, sir! It will not be kept quiet," declared Matt forcibly. "It'll be holled about, good and loud. I'm expecting it'll start a general hooraw along this part of the border. There'll be some fine-tooth combing done, you can bet on that, mister!" Then Matt's penetrating gaze perceived what he had been probing for—the stranger flinched! It was merely a flicker of expression, to be sure, but it revealed an interest such as a mere strolling fisherman would take in the subject.

"If it has grown to be as bad as all this, it's no wonder the law must jump in with both feet, Mister Officer!"

"Both feet?" taunted Matt. "No, with more feet than a centipede has got. I'm looking for a clean sweep, I don't mind telling you. Of men and caches. It's sure a time for muckers to get out from under. Stand to one side, mister, if you please. I've got to hustle to a telephone and start the hue and cry."

The man jumped to the edge of the road to escape the horses, and the make-shift funeral procession passed.

Gage did not speak till a turn of the road hid them from the stranger.

"How come, Matt, putting the bee on him like you did?"

"Speaking of insects," Gaylord drawled, "it's a case of bugs, not bees. The flat stone has been tipped over. The bugs will be scurrying. And while they're on the move a good watcher ought to be able to learn something."

"So you don't think that chap is really a fisherman, hey?"

"Sure he's fishing! He was knowing to it that a man was killed in Castol last night. And a dead man is bait, instead of those flies on that spy's hat. I was looking for a snooper. That bird there is the baby! He was never at Bragg's at all. He's fishing right here for tips on what is likely to happen. So I gave him an earful."

"Too much of an earful, I'll say. If the big fellow does send an extra posse, we can't catch 'em napping."

"No special posse will be sent for this case. That's why I lied to him. If it comes to that, I'm going to tell the boss the time isn't ripe for the big clean-up. I'll ask him to lay off. But in the meantime, the bugs will be running helter-skelter. They'll be expecting a posse, and when they can't locate it they'll keep on scampering. Oh, yes! A sharp watcher can learn something. It wouldn't surprise me a mite if the big mogul took a run up this way to find out what's what. He's the lad I'm laying for!"

"But you wouldn't be able to spot him

for the big mogul even if you should bump snoots with him," was Gage's sour response.

"Maybe I'll have to depend on animal instinct," Matt suggested serenely. "I've lived long enough in the woods to have more or less instinct."

Gage grunted. The two rode on mile after mile in silence.

Later, from the patrol headquarters, Gaylord reported by the forest local telephone to the sheriff and the medical examiner, and asked that the report be relayed to the bureau chief at the State capital.

"And please tell him, sheriff, that by sending extra men in here just now he may grease the trail we're following. Can't afford to have it too slippery. We'll tote poor Jad's body down to the stage line and meet you."

Through the rest of that day and far into the night the two men journeyed.

When they reached the settlement of Chesick they had cut into the stage line. They waited until the big coach was pulled in by the six horses, reflector lanterns planting a dancing path of radiance ahead.

While fresh horses were put to the coach for the final stage of the trip to the end of the line, the medical examiner made his official inspection and directed the temporary housing of the body in a rear room of the stage depot. He also arranged with the depot man for a wagon and horses to convey the remains the next day to Kerwin's relatives down the line. And, so far as officialdom was concerned, that was the end of Jad Kerwin.

Matt took a lantern and went into the rear room.

He lifted the packs from the gray, rigid face.

"Well, mate, this has got to be our good-by," he said in low tones. "I hope the parson will have good things to say about you. I can say only this,

but it counts a lot in your case and mine: You didn't let 'em scare you."

He replaced the cloths, patted them gently and went out to the stagecoach.

"The doc and I are going on to the end of the line, Matt," said the sheriff.

The terminus was the village of Quossoc near the Canadian border in its sweep to the southward.

There was a comfortable inn in Quossoc and the sheriff's election of a shelter for the night was understandable. Chesick settlement was merely a straggling hamlet of log houses.

Matt swapped glances with Gage. In the flare from the reflector lantern the mate's eyes glowed with a request unspoken by the tongue. Gage was married. His wife lived in Quossoc.

Matt smiled benignantly.

"It's O. K. with me, Ken. Hop aboard. Report back to-morrow. I'll stable the nags and will be waiting for you here."

"Why don't you come along, too, Matt, instead of waiting? It all amounts to the same thing if it's a case of waiting for me." Then he winked and there was meaning in the grimace.

Gaylord had made a friendly gesture, allowing a mate to go home to his wife. The mate was doing what he could to respond in kind. Marion Thorpe lived in Quossoc. Everybody knew that she and Matt were affianced.

The big sheriff had grunted his way up into the coach on the heels of the medical examiner. Through the open window the sheriff called:

"Oh, come along with us, Matt. I want to gab with you."

"I'll look after the horses," pledged the stage depot man.

Matt shrugged his shoulders and grinned. With assumed indifference he drawled:

"Guess I may as well go along, seeing as how you've all left me no excuse for staying here."

He mounted and took the middle seat

in the coach, and Gage followed in and sat beside his friend. They faced Sheriff Dave Trask and Doctor West who were in the front seat, riding backward. The rear seat was occupied by a man and his wife and two children.

These passengers dropped off at a farmhouse a half hour later.

Then the sheriff found his opportunity to speak of what was on his mind.

"I got your chief on the phone, Matt. Told him what you asked me to tell him."

"Thank you, Dave."

"He grabbed the chance to tell me I haven't been coöperating like I ought to. Seems to think that by working closer with you, a lot of this border cussedness can be stopped."

"He got no such notion from me, sheriff."

Trask tossed a disclaiming hand.

"Of course not. You're running your own rig as well as anybody can do it, considering what the conditions are up here. After a killing has been done I'll do what I can to get facts for the grand jury; but as for putting on men to stop killings, I can't spin a thread. The county treasury is already in the hole bad, and the county commissioners have got politics to consider. They have ordered me to keep out of the mess as much as I can. The county attorney is dodging, too. He won't ask even to have John Does indicted. It'll mean the expense of trying to hunt down and identify the John Does."

"The John Does are well wised up to how the thing stands," stated the patrolman.

"I'm coming out all open to you, Matt. I don't think your State service ought to be in the mess, either. The State house is meddling in Federal affairs. We ought to let the United States marshals and special agents skin their own bears."

Gage was jarred into agreement.

"That's it to a crossed T, Sheriff Trask! Only a half dozen of us to cover all these wild-land townships: Timber-jack riots here, there and all about for us to handle! If we clean up our own business inside the State lines, we'll have all the job we can tend to."

"Well, Matt, what's your own notion?" demanded Trask.

"About the same as yours, Dave. Else I'd be talking like a fool. But I've been ordered to coöperate. I take my orders from *my* boss, just as you take yours from the county commissioners. When an officer lets his private notions stand ahead of orders from headquarters, he doesn't belong back of a badge."

The sheriff laughed, agreeing.

"That sure holds me, Matt! You and I won't argue. But I don't work under State orders, and I can say the State house is all wrong in this extra stuff they're sending you boys up against."

Matt filled his pipe and lighted it, the job giving him an excuse for lack of comment or reply.

Gage again took it on himself to grumble complaints, but closed his mouth when his superior snapped: "That'll be enough, Ken!"

Doctor West did his bit to relieve a silence which was rather embarrassing.

"As I understand it, Gaylord, you're mostly up against a gang handling narcotics."

"Yes, doctor. That's why they're so savage. Bigger stakes, dirtier business! They're not so bad along other sections of the border, handling booze and aliens."

"Tell me, Gaylord. You have spoken merely of duty. But isn't your sense of duty backed by hatred of this traffic?"

"I reckon it is, Doctor West. I've had a chance to see what the devilish stuff can do to folks."

"And, of course, as a physician I've had a better chance. Probably the Federal folks are doing all they can to stop

the smuggling, but the government is a big machine. Too big a machine, I'm afraid, to grind small enough grist to take care of the details such as you find them on the border."

"There's sure something the trouble, somewhere, doctor. I don't know what it is. I can only keep plugging along."

The doctor patted Matt's shoulder.

"Go to it, big chap. Every so often, after I have tried to pull some poor devil out of the hellfire of the habit, I feel like grabbing a rifle and running up to the border and putting bullets through the hellions who are bringing in the stuff."

"Jad Kerwin was that way," said Matt gravely. "Crazy mad about getting 'em. It was on account of his mother. Morphine got her."

After a period of silence, Gaylord and Gage, following a signal of snores from the drowsing sheriff, crawled to the rear seat and napped.

They were roused by the cracking of the driver's whip. He had come to the smoother stretch of turnpike outside Quoosoc village, and was making up time. The hour was near midnight.

Through the trap Gage called to the driver:

"Hold up at my house, Jeff."

"Don't need to tell me that," retorted the man on the box.

"Matt, you're going to stop with me, of course," suggested Gage, when he sat back beside Gaylord.

"No, I'll hang out at the tavern."

"But you'll be putting Elsa's nose out o' joint, doing that."

"Give the wife all my best, Ken, but it's the tavern for me. Outside of not wanting to butt into your house at this hour, I'll have telephoning to do before breakfast. Here's the idea, pal. We won't be going back to Chesick in the morning. We'll give the horses a day's rest."

Gage nudged his chief with suggestive elbow.

"Oh, yes! I'll admit I'd like to see Marion," Matt acknowledged, his lips close to Kenny's ear. "But now I've got even a bigger thing on my mind. Line o' duty. Seeing I'm here, I want to make a general size-up of strangers in Quoosoc. And I'll be making a run over to Dowling's place."

He had named a place on the border, a mile or so from Quoosoc, the jumping-off village for the region.

"I won't be needing you, Ken. Take it all easy at home. I'll get in touch with you late in the day, probably."

"You ought to have me along with you at Dowling's," protested the other.

"If I expected trouble I'd take you along, of course. But there won't be any trouble—not this trip. Take it easy, I tell you. I'll phone upcountry and locate Phil, so he can hustle to headquarters and be on deck in case of calls." He was referring to one of the patrolmen.

When the coach halted, Gage leaped out and ran toward a cottage, signaling his arrival with a joyous "Yoo-hoo!" A door was opened and was slammed.

The sheriff chuckled.

"Well, Matt, how long will it be before you're doing that same thing?"

"The date hasn't been set, Dave," replied the patrolman, smiling.

"But don't keep such a nice, pretty girl waiting too long."

"She is willing to wait, sheriff, till I do a special job I've set out to do. In fact, I don't mind telling you, as a friend of both of us, that she says the wedding bells will sound better after I ring the bell in another matter."

The sheriff enlightened the attentive Doctor West.

"She's that kind of a girl, doc. Ready and anxious to stand at Matt's elbow and stuff cartridges into the loops of his belt. None of the Thorpes but what hated a quitter, and Marion is sure keen on a size-up. She has paid you a master fine compliment, Matt, picking you."

"Thank you, sheriff. I'm doing my best to make the compliment fit." Ten minutes later the three tumbled into beds at the tavern.

While he was undressing, Gaylord reflected that he had easily succumbed to the temptation to come to Quossoc. At Chesick he had been thinking that he ought to hurry back to the north border to watch the scurrying of the "bugs" in that region. He was admitting his eager longing to see Marion. The word from the sheriff had turned the scales. Matt had a peculiar job. In following it he played his hunches.

"I feel as if something is going to happen down this way," he mused. "Dowling's is a pretty special hangout for a lot of 'em. There'll be something doing in these parts, I reckon."

It was a truer prophecy than he realized at the moment.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A SECRET DEAL.

HIS catnapping in the stagecoach had taken the edge off Matt's hankering for slumber. In the tavern he was awake for a time after pulling the blankets over his shoulders.

In the corridor he heard footsteps, the irregular tramping of one man following another. Manifestly it was a still later arrival, escorted by the tavern's night man to a room. There sounded the *click-clack* of a key in a door nearly opposite Gaylord's quarters.

The new guest evidently remained in the corridor, looking into the room; Matt could hear him plainly.

"I say, old top, doesn't this room face the east?"

"Sure thing! So you can say 'Da-da' to the sun when he pops up."

"But I don't want to say anything at all to the sun. I don't even want to know there is a sun till noon. Ye gods, man! I'm dead for sleep. I've been riding for hours, horseback and on a

buckboard. On that bumping stage, too! All the way from Bragg's sporting camps."

The patrolman cocked his ear over the edge of the blanket.

From Bragg's, eh? Still lying! And lying about being a passenger on the stage. Moreover, that voice with its singsong inflection was unmistakably the voice of the stranger who had got in the way of a funeral procession coming from Castol Pass.

"My gracious, this room won't do at all! I must have one on the west or north—so I can sleep very long in the dark—till noon, I hope."

"How about a bunk in the cellar, mister?" sourly queried the night man.

"Give me any more lip and I'll crack you with this rod case."

So! He was further identifying himself as the fisherman.

"And handle the luggage carefully," the voice commanded.

"Plenty of it, I'll say. But it doesn't heft like you had much wet bait left over," commented the porter grumpily. The heavy steps went on along the corridor.

So this chap, eh, had come riding posthaste to the region's center of activities, wasting not an hour of the day and the night?

More than ever was the patrolman convinced that this stranger was fishing for something beside trout. Had he come to Quossoc in order to report to somebody higher up? In furtherance of certain plans, Gaylord was vitally concerned with getting at the real god of the border machine. Privately, he was agreeing with Ken Gage about the futility of the pancake stuff, merely fighting hired gunmen on their level of combat.

He decided on a scheme of action, then he went to sleep.

In the early morning, before dressing, he wrapped a blanket about himself,

walked along the corridor and rapped on the landlord's door. Matt, a frequent guest, was familiar with the premises.

"It's Matt Gaylord," he announced to the landlord on the other side of the door.

Immediately it was opened a few inches, disclosing the tavern keeper in a flannel nightgown, who was blinking his sleepy eyes.

"I can't ask you in, Matt. The woman ain't up."

"I don't want to come in, Dan. I'm asking you to lend me a suit of your clothes—an old suit, along with that slouch hat I've seen you wearing. For good reasons I don't want to tog out in my uniform to-day."

"I get you. Stand here and I'll pass out a rig. Guess my duds will just about fit you."

"I reckoned the same before I came here to ask for 'em."

Back in his own room Gaylord rigged himself and perceived that he was well fitted.

Downstairs in the office he found the clerk sweeping out and tidying up the big room. He greeted Matt casually and glanced at the latter's garb.

"You've shucked the uniform, hey? Quitting the job or only laying off?"

"Laying off for a few days, Jake."

"So as to go to Jad's funeral, of course? I got it all, over the phone. I'll admit you're A1 in your job, Matt, but I don't believe you stand much show o' ketching the fly-by-nighters who drilled Jad."

"I'm afraid you're right," admitted the officer.

At that moment a waitress pulled the bolt of the double doors of the dining room, and Gaylord walked in.

After he had eaten he came out and sat for a time in the office, smoking, an inconspicuous figure in a corner of the room, his face shadowed by the brim of the slouch hat.

It was too early in the day for any activity. Without special interest he saw the other guests of the inn come straggling down to breakfast. They were patently timber operators, cruisers, caliper chaps, and some, more smartly attired, were traveling salesmen.

The drummers ate hurriedly and hustled out on their affairs with the local tradesmen.

The clerk, now having spare time, lighted a cigar which he took from the counter case; then he came and lounged in a chair beside Gaylord.

"They have to hiper their boots these days, them drummers do, so as to get ahead of tother feller," averred Jake, pointing his cigar at a salesman who was staggering away with a couple of sample cases. "But take a look at that rooster coming down stairs," he added in tones cautiously low.

The stout man was descending leisurely. He was making sharp survey of the loiterers in the office. Going to the counter, he pulled to him the dog-eared book of registry and scanned the names. Then he sauntered into the dining room.

"What about him?" prodded Matt, when the clerk had remained discreetly silent for some minutes.

"Why, you don't see *him* tuggerlugging sample cases. He blew in here yesterday with a special hitch, made us clean out the storage room, and he and his driver sacked in four big trunks. Says he's going to open up his samples and make the storekeepers come in here to pick and choose. I'm wondering whether he'll get any Quossooc traders to do it."

"It's done in other places, I understand, but it's apt to be too much of a new trick for the old dogs in this village," Matt suggested. "What's he carrying for a line?"

"He hasn't opened up as yet, but from what he dropped to me it's dress goods and trimmings and such like."

Womenfolks like to gad and paw over, and maybe he'll be able to toll in 'Dry-goods Sarah' and some of the others in her line."

Matt was aware of taking a bit of special interest in this man who had been singled out of the ruck of the other drummers. He seemed to be so cocksure, in demeanor and actions. He dawdled over his breakfast as if he had all the time in the world; Gaylord could see him at table through the open doorway.

When he came back into the office he selected a fat cigar from his case and smoked while he patrolled the long room. Then he went upstairs, returned presently and continued to promenade and smoke.

All at once Matt pulled lower the brim of his slouch hat. The stranger of the Castol trail was coming down the stairs.

The hands of the office clock were marking nine; this was not sleeping till noon! The patrolman, already on edge regarding this man, again found his suspicions stirring. He added one and one and made two of the sum. Maybe the stout man had maybe faked an errand upstairs. Too promptly the other man had come downstairs. The latter hurried toward the door of the dining room; the waitress was closing the portal.

Passing the stout man the newcomer had given him no attention.—Matt was disappointed because he wanted to add another one to his little sum and make three in his chain of circumstances. However, he was immediately heartened. The late breakfaster asked the girl to wait a moment. He turned and looked about the office. He walked toward the stout man and asked, stressing his tones for all to hear:

"Does this happen to be Mr. Bernstein?"

"That's my name, sir."

"And my name is Banton—Andrew

Banton, sir. I'm certainly much obliged for your card, notifying me you'd be here with samples. I hurried in on the stage last evening. After I get a bite to eat we'll do business, Mr. Bernstein. I'm opening with all stock fresh and new, as I told you in my letter. I hope you can give me the forenoon for going over the samples."

"I'll lock the door against all other customers," agreed the stout man.

The customer went into the dining room.

That open conference had arranged a strictly private session and had advertised it handsomely, so ran Matt's opinion, suspicion still sharpening his wits. The repetition of the lie about being a passenger on the stage clinched his convictions. This snooper of the Castol trail was ready to report to the man higher up! In thought and speech Matt had long been terming the mogul of the gang "the big kibosh." He surveyed the stout man with fresh interest, the hat brim shading keen eyes. Had he at last come up with the big kibosh?

"Wonder what place 'Hustler' Banton has picked for his new store," said the clerk. "I reckon you came in on the stage, too. Did Banton say where he's going to open?"

"No, he didn't say," returned Matt demurely.

The clerk dismissed the subject with: "Probably locating in Tomhegan. The new pulp mill is bringing 'em in fast."

After making quick work of his breakfast, Banton came into the office and again spoke out freely, making no secret of his business transactions with Bernstein.

"In my rush I forgot to thank you for sending on those samples of staples. I've made selections and will turn the samples back to you if you have room for 'em in your trunks."

"I planned on taking the goods back with me, Mr. Banton, and have left room for them." Bernstein dropped the

stub of his cigar into a cuspidor. "If you're ready now, we'll get at the other samples."

"In a minute, sir, as soon as I get the clerk to help me down with the cases. I'll help you pack the samples."

The hotel man obeyed the summons of an uplifted finger and hurried upstairs with Banton.

Matt waited in his chair until they came down, each toting two large cases of stout leather.

As soon as they had disappeared behind the door of the storeroom, the patrolman sauntered out of the tavern. He swung off the main street in order to avoid meeting up with too many persons who knew him. After turning several corners in the residential section, he let himself through a gate into the yard in front of a cottage. A plump matron was on her knees in the yard, setting out plants and small shrubs.

His morning greeting was cordial, and she returned it with the manner of one who welcomed an especially favored friend with understanding.

"It's rather early for a social call, Mrs. Thorpe," was his smiling apology, "but I hope Marion will excuse me. I haven't much extra time on my hands."

"Mercy sakes! You two don't have to stand on ceremony, Matt, I hope. You'll find Marion inside, putting the house to rights."

But he was not obliged to search for the girl. She had heard his voice and came running to him on the stoop. She put her arms about his neck and met his kiss frankly and heartily.

When she stood back from him, pulling into place her Dutch house cap, a flush of delight flooding her cheeks, he admired her poise of general efficiency as much as he did her prettiness. No languorous lily, she! A true girl of the woods and the border, her natural aptitude trained by him.

Her first words were a jubilant boast. "Twenty-five shots yesterday, Matt,

five all clean in the gold and not a one outside the magpie. Sixty paces, too!"

Her reference was to target practice; she had centered handsomely in and about the bull's-eye.

"You've got all the makings," he said heartily. "How about the quick pull and aim from the hip?"

"I'm coming on fine. How soon will you add me to the force?" But her radiant mood dimmed when he became somber. "Oh, I know how you must be feeling to-day, big lad. We've heard all about poor Jad."

She turned and he followed her into the sitting room. They sat side by side on a divan.

"You mustn't worry about me," he counseled. "Jad was in a class by himself, took too many chances, forced 'em to fight him in his own style of game. The trouble up here can't be settled that way."

"Can it ever be settled, Matt—settled with a real end to it?"

"Perhaps not till human nature changes over to the angel sort," he acknowledged. "But that doesn't mean as how I have any notion of laying down on the job."

Impulsively she leaned and kissed his cheek.

"That's Matt Gaylord speaking. I do worry. But that's only about what's *outside* you, in the way of danger. If you were quitting—giving up licked—I'd worry more about what's *inside* you, Matt. The inside stuff really counts in this world. Because love and pride and faith are all inside honest folks. And I love you, dear, for what you have in your heart." The little speech was characteristic; the comment was not stilted, as she phrased it.

"At any rate, that part of a chap can stay young after he gets to be pretty homely with wrinkles and rheumatism," he averred.

"Even if the chap wears funny old clothes instead of a snappy uniform,"

she added, running her shapely hand along his sleeve. And she touched the toe of her slipper to the slouch hat which he had dropped on the floor. "Why the Nick Carter stuff?" she queried, chuckling.

"Well, I haven't gone to the limit of putting on false whiskers as yet. I borrowed these duds from 'How-be-ye Dan' Bowen so as to be less conspicuous in the village to-day. I have already been helped in watching something." Matt had given the landlord the nickname earned by his invariable salutation of arriving guests.

With eager interest, always his earnest confidante, she asked:

"What are you watching, boy? Is it any job I can help you in?"

"Maybe you can—but I'll have to do a little more thinking on it. You see," he added, tenderly jocular, "about all I can do, at first, on getting back to you, is think of Marion Thorpe. I'll say you fill my mind and my eyes!"

She patted his cheek. "You're letting your mind slip off your business. Now get back to that business. It's my business, too, if I can help in it."

"Well, pal o' mine, unless my guesser is awfully dull and my thinker has loose cogs, within the hour I've seen thousands of dollars' worth of dope transferred by a runner-in to a fence this side of the border. It's being packed right now for shipment."

Her wide eyes searched his for further information.

"I didn't try to grab the stuff. The plum wasn't ripe enough to pick, I figured. It's this way, Marion: A chap has fixed up a sample room at the tavern and gives out that he's a salesman for dress goods and what not. An accomplice is with him, pretending to be buying for a new store he's opening somewhere in these parts. He is pretending to return samples which were forwarded before the drummer came. See?"

She nodded with understanding.

"Of course, I don't want to spring the trigger too early by trying to get into that room myself. Is Dry-goods Sarah still as nosy as ever when there's a new drummer in town?"

"I get you, Matt! Do you suppose that man will open the door to Sarah and her—er—clerk?" She stressed the last word, smiling broadly.

He kissed the parted lips.

"Sweetheart, I've been adding one and one and two and two to make up my sum of—well, we'll call 'em incriminating circumstances. I heard the drummer—as we'll call him—tell Banton, the buyer, that the door would be locked against other customers. That'll probably be his play when you and Sarah breeze into the tavern. But if Sarah bears down hard enough—and she sure does know her card in that line—and the man refuses to open, he'll be showing himself up as no real drummer. Up at Castol Pass I ran across this fellow who calls himself Banton, and pretends to be buying. But he's a spy and a smuggler, believe me. So, let's go to it."

Marion hurried to her room to dress for the street.

The officer went back to the tavern to post himself unobtrusively in the corner of the general room.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A WARNING.

WHEN Dry-goods Sarah and her companion entered the inn, they went directly to the desk, and Sarah stated that she had business with Mr. Bernstein.

"He has locked himself into the sample room with a customer," declared Jake, the clerk, "and left word with me he don't want to be bothered."

"Bothered, hey?" Sarah's tones were shrill with indignation. "Pretty fresh talk for a drummer to make when he's

in the market with goods! If you don't go and knock on that door, I'll take it on myself to do so."

"Guess you *had* better take it on yourself, ma'am. He didn't give off no orders to you like he done to me."

Accordingly Sarah marched across the room, with Marion, her "clerk," at her heels. The clerk found opportunity to flick a glance of amused triumph at Gaylord in his corner.

There was no hint of apology in Sarah's knock. She was a big woman with an assertive manner, and she put plenty of that assertion into the tattoo with her doubled fist.

"Who is it?" called a voice within.

"A customer."

"I'm too busy with this customer in here to take on another just now."

"Look here, mister, I'm Gillot of the Ladies' and Misses' Emporium. I'm the busiest woman in this village, but I've taken time off to come here to look at samples. I can look at 'em while you're talking to anybody you have in there. Open this door and let me in, with my clerk."

It was a wrathful challenge.

There was considerable ire in the reply.

"I tell you I'm making a big deal with a gentleman, and I can't be bothered with picayune stuff."

Sarah sucked in plenty of breath and clamored:

"That's an insult, calling my trade picayune! Now you've got my dander up. If you keep me on the hooks any longer, I'm liable to go out on the street and round up a few men and have 'em bust this door in, so I can see what kind of a drummer it is who's calling Sarah Gillot names." She beat with both fists on the door.

Within there was the mumble of a deep voice.

"Now you're swearing, and in the presence of ladies, too, because we can hear you. That's the final touch, mister.

I'm going to find out what kind of drummer you are, turning trade away and cussing about it."

Matt grinned in the shadow of his slouch hat. He had sicked a tiger cat onto Mister Bernstein and was relishing the result. He realized that his suspects had never foreseen anything of this sort.

"What's that you say?" demanded Sarah, her ear against the door panel. "Oh, you'll be ready for me in a minute, will you? Well, make the minute short, mister. I handle minutes like I count dollar bills."

After a space of time, during which Sarah knocked repeatedly and urged haste, Bernstein opened the door, making a great effort to be suave in his greeting. But he was gray around the gills, so Matt noted, and betrayed the nervousness usually hitched up with a guilty conscience.

Sarah and her companion walked past Bernstein into the room.

Before long the waiting officer was more fully informed that his suspicions were well based.

Dry-goods Sarah, having dispensed with her vocal soft pedal years before, proclaimed for the world to hear—providing the world was taking interest in the matter:

"Say, Mister Drummer, because they live up here near the woods, do you think the womenfolks are as much behind the times as the Pilgrim mothers would be? You'd better come along with me to the Ladies' and Misses' Emporium and pick up pointers on up-to-date goods. I wouldn't buy from your samples, even to stock a store in Patagonia. If this man here is buying from you, he must have been living twenty years in a State's prison somewhere—and in solitary confinement, at that! He's behind the times that much!"

This innuendo about prison would startle them, Matt reflected with relish.

After this sweeping criticism, Sarah

departed from the tavern with her clerk. Marion again swapped triumphant glances with Matt and tossed an inviting gesture with her hand.

When Bernstein had slammed and locked the door of the sample room, again isolating himself and Banton, Matt walked forth and overtook Marion, who was loitering on a side street, on her way home.

"So his goods are the bunk, eh?"

"Not as bad as Sarah made out, of course. The man is too wise to make his pretense ridiculous, if it is pretense."

"How do you figure it, Marion?"

"I think he's faking the drummer business, Matt. Too small a stock of samples. Too many trunk tills that he didn't open. If he intends to carry something away from here, he has plenty of room, using his samples to mask the real stuff. I'm sure your guesser and thinker are in good order, big chap." She patted his bared head. "And now what?"

"It's simple, Marion, because there's only one thing to do—go after it."

"Here in the village—with a search warrant?"

"I'd be breaking service rules by doing that."

"Yes, I know. In village limits the deputy sheriff or a policeman has the call over you. Your field is in the unincorporated townships," she stated, with pride in the knowledge he had shared with her.

"I'll have to tackle the thing down the line, in the open country. I don't want the local officers balling up the case here."

"I'd hate to have you call them in on it, Matt. It's all your own. And I'm so proud of you."

He demurred, smiling indulgently. "But it's sure fine to have a girl like you, Marion, keeping me always tuned up to concert pitch. And, by the way, I wish Kenny Gage had a wife of your style. He's getting cold feet, and I

don't like to think that the ice is being put to 'em by somebody under his own roof."

Her countenance became grave. There were creases in her forehead now, and a glint of something like hard decision gleamed in her eyes when she raised them to his face.

"Matt, I'm sorry you're so tied up to Ken by friendship. I've been keeping my mouth shut. I hate to mar that friendship with him."

"Perhaps you'd better not say anything, Marion, and be sorry for it later." They had been strolling slowly. They halted beneath a tree, she obeying his touch on her arm. "Ken came down with me, helping tote Jad's body. I'm hoping a little time at home with Elsa will give him a new grip."

"And I'm afraid this time at home will everlastingly spoil him for more work with you, Matt," she declared forcibly. "For your dear sake I've been digging into things as best I can."

"But I'll have to give him his chance to-night—figuring on being obliged to grab into the case right soon."

She took both his hands into her clasp.

"Don't have him along, Matt! Don't risk it."

"Risk!" he blurted amazedly. "My best friend, my mate, a risk?"

"Sometimes, with a woman teaming him, a man can be jockeyed so he'll jump sky high over the friendship fence, even riding over the friend," was her sage comment.

"Do you class Ken as being spoiled that much?"

"Yes, I do, knowing what I know," she declared boldly. "Matt, I don't want to talk out to you here in the open road. Come along with me to the house."

He started, in her company, then he stopped. He pondered.

"Marion, I'm thinking I'll have to put in a little special work before I come

to your house." He smiled with a rueful twist of his lips. "Our Sarah is a corking operator, but in this case I'm afraid she rather overdid the thing. She scared Bernstein. His face showed it when he opened the door. He's naturally skittish if he has a lot of dope in those trunks. If he thinks there's something behind her performance, he's had an extra scare thrown into him. He has a special hitch, I'm told, and he may try for a get-away right soon in the daytime."

"It would really be his best play," the girl agreed. "It would look perfectly natural, and nobody would think of stopping him, outside of you."

"He mustn't skip out till some time in the night, Marion. Ten to one he has gunmen down the road. There'd be too many odds against me in a daylight tussle. I'll have to play some game to hold him here till night comes."

"What can you do?" she asked anxiously.

"Right now I've got only a glimmer of a notion, hardly worth bothering you with. I'll hustle away and see what can be done with it. Wait at home for me. I'll be trotting to you pretty soon."

She asked no more questions, offered no protest.

"Go to it, big lad!"

He slapped on his hat and hurried away. Over his shoulder he called:

"You're sure a real helper, girl o' mine."

"Perhaps I can prove it in even a better way." With determination she added: "At any rate, I mean to try it."

He stopped and looked after her when she walked away. In the past he had found her ready in any sort of co-operation. But in this latest promise of action he found a new note in her tones, a new resolution, a pledge to perform in some matter which had taken shape in her mind. It could not be merely in regard to Kenny Gage. She

had previously expressed herself on that topic.

Matt went on his way, a bit mystified. He set his thoughts on putting in more coherent shape a scheme to hold Bernstein in Quossoc till after nightfall.

Entering the Gaylord Pharmacy by way of the rear door, he found his brother, Tom, the proprietor, putting up a prescription. Matt, after the greetings, laid his arm across the brother's shoulder and explained the situation.

"And what can you fix up, Tommy, to put those nags of his on the blink for a few hours—not hurting them, of course?"

The druggist reached up to a shelf and tapped his finger on a bottle. "This stuff—in a bolus. But what about the chap hiring a couple more horses from the livery stable?"

"He can't get any of the stage teams, of course. And while I was sitting in the tavern office, I heard a timber explorer trying to coax a hitch out of Bowen. Nothing doing! All not already let out are keeled up with the horse ail." He chuckled. "Bernstein will think his plugs have caught it, too. Guess he isn't horse doctor enough to know the difference."

"That being the case, it ought to check well enough for you," admitted the brother. He suspended work on the prescription and hastily fixed up doses for the horses, responding to Matt's call for speed.

While he rolled the big pills he talked.

"Those nags won't have any special ambish till well into the night, after they get this stuff in their systems. Even then they'll be more or less logy. They'll be perfectly willing to stop and take it easy during a holdup. How many men are you taking, Matt?"

"I may tackle it alone," stated the officer, remembering keenly Marion's warning.

"Look here! I'm a damn good mind to shift the dose and pep the nags up

so the chap can make a get-away right now," railed the chemist. "You are taking too many chances all the time. Hasn't this Kerwin affair put brakes to you at all?"

"I can't allow it to do that, Tom. When I quit my job I won't do it piece-meal. I'll resign. I promise you I won't be a fool if Bernstein has picked up too many gunmen before he meets up with me. I'll duck away and use the telephone and put the Federal men wise, and they can watch trains at the junctions down country. Those trunks will be as easy to spot as church steeples."

The brother grunted his relief and delivered the pills.

"You can palm 'em all handy, Matt. Toss 'em back as far's you can in the throat so the horse can't chew 'em."

"Do you have to tell me how to give medicine to a horse, you old pestle pounder?" chuckled the officer, marching out and away.

To be sure of conditions he asked the hostler in the tavern stable if there was any chance of hiring a hitch in the village. With profanity, the hostler assured Matt there was not a chance.

"And even them two down there at the end of the line—they're going out! That drummer has ordered 'em put to his wagon right after the noon meal."

Therefore, so ran Matt's thoughts, his judgment had been good when he guessed at a daylight get-away. Dry-goods Sarah's performance, manifestly, had precipitated action.

The hostler climbed to the scaffold to pitch down hay for the noon feeding.

Gaylord went to the horses which had been indicated as Bernstein's hitch, petted them as a horse owner knew how to do in securing equine confidence, then dosed them, one after the other, holding shut the slobbering jaws until the animals had swallowed.

Then he went to the conference requested by Marion, wondering what

revelations she would make regarding Kenny Gage.

Matt was prepared for any kind of disclosures; his friend's attitude in regard to the service had been disquieting for many weeks.

Furthermore, he had absolute faith in Marion's good judgment and perspicacity.

## CHAPTER V.

### A CAPTURE!

**I**N the sitting room of the Thorpe home the girl went to the business without preamble or apology for her allegations.

"Matt, I'm not saying that Kenny is a deliberate traitor. I'm laying most of the blame on Elsa. She has undermined his loyalty. I may seem decidedly unfriendly in what I say about her, but she has had the impudence to come to me and coax me to try the same operation on you."

"I never did think she was overburdened with brains," growled Matt; "but her sizing up of you and me in that way looks like she has gone plumb cuckoo."

"Some folks in this world will do anything for money, Matt." She met his stare of inquiry with the fortitude of one who was sure of her facts. "Elsa has been getting money from some source. The girl is square enough in her loyalty as a wife, I'm sure, though she is vain and extravagant."

"She keeps Ken broke all the time, as I know."

"But even on top of spending all he can give her, she ran up a bill of several hundred dollars with Dry-goods Sarah. And Sarah was talking about it too much—because Sarah does talk a lot about everything. All at once Elsa settled the bill. And she paid in hundred-dollar bank notes, too. Her father sent her the money, so Elsa told Sarah."

"But her dad is a popple-wood peeler way up on the Grand Tulic lands, and never saw a hundred-dollar bill."

"I know it; but Elsa had to say something, of course."

"It seems to me like gang money, coming in that size," the officer commented. "Those birds don't carry small change on their hips."

She nodded.

"Matt, if she has taken money once, she is under their thumbs and will find it easy to take more money and handle Ken with it. You know how she can always twist him. That's why I told you on the street that I'm afraid of what may happen on this last visit of his. Elsa is now like a tiger, after a first taste of blood. She has worked herself into the feeling that it's perfectly right to take that kind of money like so many others are doing. She told me so. And when I told her what I thought of it, she flew into a temper and said they'd get you, too, by hook or crook, sooner or later, and that I am a fool to run you into danger where there's no money coming from it."

She hesitated, surveyed him with deep concern, then blurted what was on her woman's mind:

"Matt, I've never, as you know, said one word to discourage you or make you discontented with the work you're in. And that's because I'm hoping you don't intend to follow along in it."

"No more do I, Marion, and I'm telling it to you straight. I can have a super job with the Telos when I'm ready for it. Was told so this week. I'll take that job when I've shown the gang and the service that the big kibosh can be netted. If I can turn a trick like that it may be of some help to the lads who take over the job after I get through. So I'm sticking on."

"Do you think this Bernstein man is the real ringleader?"

"He may be fairly close to the king row; he's from the big city all right enough. However, I'm not classing him as the real chief. But if I can net him and the trunks, it'll sure be a big

haul. Then the real kibosh may take a scoot up here to find out what's the matter with the machine, all of a sudden."

With anxiety, she ventured:

"It'll be well known who threw in the wrench, Matt, and then you'll be the target."

"Bright mind, girl o' mine! If I was only an also-ran I'd be overlooked. But the big fellow will probably heave himself straight at me, and then I'll find out who he is. So this is why I'm planning to make the Bernstein job as much a one-man trick as I can. And the haul ought to be mighty pretty where the dope is concerned. As I told you, I met that other chap near Castol Pass. He was out to pick up pointers from the Kerwin case. And I gave him a pointer. Told him a posse would be flung along the border for a round-up of smugglers and caches. So, as I figure it, he has toted in here a big bunch of the stuff to be ahead of the rush that will come later."

"You have a dreadfully ticklish job for to-night, Matt," she insisted. "You mustn't depend on Ken Gage after he has had a day with Elsa."

"It's for to-night," he told her gravely. "I have doped Bernstein's horses. He was intending to make a daylight get-away, just as we guessed he might. Even when the horses are able to travel they'll be sleepwalking. Probably the accomplice will travel with Bernstein. That isn't his name, of course, because his mug isn't built that way. I can get the drop on the two of 'em easy enough."

"But if they pick up gunmen?"

"I'm playing a chance shot they don't do that. Sarah, of course, went after Bernstein because he wasn't looking for any such break-in. But by now he ought to be feeling that his drummer rôle will let him by without pulling in an army. And his men are probably mighty busy smuggling things along the

border. At any rate, I'm letting it all run as it's headed."

They heard the slam of the garden gate, looked from the window and saw Tom Gaylord trotting up the path between the flower beds.

Matt ran to the door and admitted his brother.

"I knew pretty well where I'd find you," panted Tom. "I've hurried to post you. Doc Cyphers, the vet, has been called on that horse case. He diagnosed pretty close to the mark, I must say. Came into my shop to get an antidote and had to tell what for, of course."

"So he'll have them on their feet again all of a sudden, damn it!"

Tom grinned. "You needn't get fussed up enough to cuss in the presence of a lady, Matt." The druggist winked at Marion. "To blazes with this ethics stuff, as a pharmacist. I was a brother before I opened a drug store. I handed the old doc something in the bromide and sedative line, and he won't know the difference. Those horses will only roll over into a more comfortable position and will sleep sweetly till well into the evening."

Matt embraced his brother joyously

"But hold on!" protested Tom. "You can't sit down and think you're eating one o' my peach sundaes, not yet. Doc told that drummer, or whatever he is, that the horses had been doped. Doc was too proud of his diagnosis, I guess. He is proud of something else, too. Just now he came into the store again and told me he had struck a customer who knew how to pay for ability. Showed me a fifty-dollar bill—his fee for the horse case. I guess the man will knock doc down and pick his pockets for that money a little later on; but that's doc's lookout."

"I'll snap to the main point, Matt. That man couldn't bribe the hostler so as to get a pair of horses from the stage-line outfit, but for fifty dollars Uncle

Hostler looked the other way and let that chum of Bernstein's gallop away on one horse, after he had sworn himself blue in the face, promising to get the horse back in the early evening.

"If you don't figure as I'm figuring, Matt, you're a fool. That snooper rode west, into the Douglass trail, doc says. But surer'n there's a hole in a doughnut, he'll be circling to the east so as to fetch Dowling's place across the border. He'll be starting a gang of gunmen west across the boundary line; they'll be picked up by Bernstein and his pal. And you'll be fighting that army if you tackle the job to-night." He sliced his palm through the air. "So it's all off."

Matt started for the door.

"I'm off—that's what you mean!" He looked inquiringly at Marion.

"Take Chestnut Boy, Matt. He's fresh. I've been riding Black Betty for the last few days."

Tom chased on the heels of his brother.

"Quit, Matt. It's getting too big for you."

Rolling open the stable door, Matt retorted: "Condemn it, Tom, can't you see I'm trimming it down into a sizable shape to be handled? I'll ride east and cut the Douglass trail and stop that alarm signal. If I happen to miss him, I'll probably spend the evening eating ice cream in your place."

He threw on a saddle, cinched the girths, mounted a horse which was full of ginger after its lay-off, and galloped past the girl who had taken her stand in the orchard to give him her God-speed.

The horse cleared the rear fence of the Thorpe premises in an easy bound.

"Good work, kid!" vouchsafed Matt, leaning to the chestnut's ear. "If we let a spavined stage horse beat us to Dowling's, you and I'd better go into the old-rags-and-junk business."

Through pasture, along gullies, over cradle-knolled hills he urged the horse

at top speed; then through a forest, the aisles of which allowed him to make almost as quick time.

When he came to the Douglass tote road, he dismounted and searched carefully along the moist mold under the trees; he found no fresh hoofprints and was satisfied that the emissary had not passed. His satisfaction was more serene because, so he estimated, the man would stick to the main trail, probably being a stranger to other devious paths leading to the border.

He remounted.

To avoid the appearance of lurking in wait, he rode slowly along the tote road, going to meet the rider, who was about due to heave in sight.

Shortly the man who called himself Banton came around an elbow of the road, bouncing clumsily on the back of the stage horse. He slowed the stiff-legged nag from canter to walk when he approached Gaylord. The brim of the latter's slouch hat was pulled low, and the dim light in the tunnel through the thickly fronded blackgrowth helped Matt in concealing temporarily his identity.

"Say, mister, is this the road to Dowling's place?" asked Banton, not recognizing Gaylord.

"Sure is," drawled Matt.

"Have you come from there?"

"Yep."

Matt pulled the chestnut to a standstill and produced his pipe from the breast pocket of his coat. In lighting the dottle he was able to shield his face still more, curving his palms.

Banton made a cursory survey of what he could see clearly, the unkempt rig-out of a man who might be almost anything in the way of a border personality—outwardly a nonentity.

"Excuse me for asking, but are you hitched up with Dowling, or are you only transient in these parts?"

Over the edge of the curved hands Matt closed one eye slowly.

"I'm onto you, Mister Federal undercover man!"

Banton gasped; then he jerked out an oath.

"What the devil do you mean, classing me with those pups?"

The match went on under a purposeful puff. Matt held one hand in front of his face while he tamped the tobacco with a forefinger. He dredged in his pocket with the other hand, taking his time in hunting for a match.

"I play all come-by-chances as snoopers, stranger, till it's proved different."

"I don't blame you," affirmed Banton more mildly. "I might say the same thing about *you*. No matter whether you're hitched up with Dowling or not. But you can be sociable enough to tell me whether there's much of a crowd hanging around his place right now." His face cleared measurably of doubts. "I guess, after all, you wouldn't have been on the premises if you're an officer."

"That's good guessing," admitted Matt. "Because considerable of a gang is there to-day, I'm willing to tell you." And he was lighting his pipe.

"Somehow you look familiar," blurted Banton. "Haven't we met somewhere?"

"Not that I know of. But your memory may be better'n mine."

"Oh, I suppose a lot of men look alike up in these woods."

Matt puffed on the pipe and continued to stopper the tobacco with a forefinger, his broad hand masking the lower part of his visage.

"Guess I'd better fix it so we'll know each other next time, anyway. And the light is a little dim in here. I'll sidle up and you can take a good squint at my physiog."

He knew the training of the chestnut, having been the educator of this gift to Marion. The horse obeyed the hint of a heel and danced close to Banton's mount with disconcerting celerity. The excuse for proximity had been

good and Banton made no effort to elude. He was an entirely passive target, unsuspicuous.

The man carried a gun or two hidden on him, Matt knew well enough. There must be no shooting. Banton was merely a pawn in this game—and was a long way from the king row, so the officer opined. Therefore, Matt merely moved this pawn.

When the horses were close and parallel, Gaylord struck vigorously, hooking his right fist under Banton's jaw. The man went off his mount, sagging in unconsciousness, and flopped inertly on the duff.

The stage horse, losing a rider, became a self-acting proposition. He whirled and cantered away full tilt, homing back to his stable.

Matt dragged Banton off into the undergrowth in order to get out of sight of possible passers along the road. The chestnut, well trained, obeyed a call and followed placidly.

First of all the officer frisked Banton for weapons. There was a six-shooter in a holster under the man's left arm; there was another gun in a belt hidden by his coat. Matt used the belt to secure the captive's wrists, pulling Banton's arms behind his back. This manhandling brought the prisoner back to consciousness.

Matt broke in on the rageful babbling.

"No matter about who I am or what this means!"

Still dizzied by the blow and lying on his face, unable to view his captor clearly, Banton was busy with ireful queries.

Matt stood astraddle and pulled the man to his feet. With a hand twisted in Banton's coat collar, walking behind, Matt marched his prisoner through the woods. The chestnut trailed.

For a few moments the officer's thoughts were roiled by apprehensiveness. That horse had gone galloping

back to the tavern stable—an alarm signal that would complicate the situation. Losing Banton by some mysterious accident, surmising that the word had not been carried to the gunmen at Dowling's place, Bernstein, likely enough, would think long thoughts and would decide to brave the conditions at Quossooc for that night or longer, until he could assure himself of protection on the road out toward the railroad. For Matt's purposes, so the officer reflected, Bernstein must go that night. Otherwise, on the morrow, he would be finding a way of getting in touch with helpers. Bernstein, scared by the return of the stage horse, must be promptly reassured.

Gaylord knew his locality and the denizens thereof.

Marching behind, thrusting his captive along at a lively jog, the officer was heading for Pete Saucier's shack. Pete was a hermit chap who worked ash stuff into canoe paddles, setting poles and the like. The general store at Quossooc handled his output.

Matt went to Saucier for help in this matter; a long-time friendship was the basis for his confidence that this help would be given.

Pete heard the hail and came out of his cabin, a draw shave in his hand.

"P'rapping I cut heem up for yo', hey?" he inquired jocularly, swishing his shave menacingly.

Banton squawked in fright.

"Not unless he tries to run away before I come to get him," stated Matt, conveying all sorts of information to Saucier with merely a wink. "I don't need to tell you what kind he is. And I'm in a devil of a hurry. Tie up his feet and pen him in your back room. Not a word to him, understand? If he blats too much, wrap a towel around his jaws."

"Just as yo' say! And what yo' say she goes for me every time." Pete set clutch on the prisoner.

Matt leaped into the saddle and was away in an instant. Out of his thoughts went the affair of Banton, like a sum swept off a slate by a wet sponge. Pete could be trusted. But on his mental slate the officer began to figure another sum regarding what was ahead of him. He had no fear now of identification, with Banton out of the way.

He left the chestnut in a side street and walked into the tavern office. Only the clerk and the landlord were there.

Matt tipped his head, and Proprietor Bowen followed him into the latter's private office.

"Where's the high-pressure drummer, Dan?"

"Out in the stable, where he's been most all day caring for them hosses o' his."

"Are they sick?" asked Matt demurely, fending the possibility of suspicion from the druggist brother.

"According to my size-up, they're only having happy dreams and hate to quit 'em."

Matt put his nose rather close to Bowen's.

"Dan, I hate to be prying a good customer off your premises, but we have always stood in close in the past and I know I'm safe in asking more favors. And, by the way, did the stage horse come back O. K.?"

"Sure did—in a hurry."

"I don't suppose Bernstein hugged and kissed him, hey?"

"Hardly! The hostler tells me that little 'Fatty' hopped around the stable floor like a frog on a hot skillet, and wanted to hire all the hosses in town and start a searching party. Say, Matt, don't talk out any more'n you feel like saying, but this thing is all in the line of your job, ain't it?"

"That's what, Dan. And I can't yip any more just now."

"That's O. K. Tell me no more. Then you can't be laying any leak to me."

"But I've got to say a little something. It's to ask you to lend me your tongue along with this suit of yours I'm wearing."

Bowen stuck out the tongue mentioned; wagged it between his thumb and forefinger. "It seems to be in good working order, Matt. Say how it'd be used!"

"Go out to the stable and tell Bernstein a man came to you with a word from Banton. The man was riding this way from Dowling's, you see, and met up with Banton hoofing it toward the border. Banton asked the man to report to the tavern that the stage horse shied at a rabbit and threw Banton off. But Banton wanted Mr. Bernstein to know that the customers would be told how Bernstein had been obliged to hurry back to the city to-night. He's to go ahead as planned because everything would be fixed all right—and not to worry."

"That'll make easy talking," said the landlord. "It ought to be good news. I always like to please guests."

Matt went back to the waiting chestnut and rode to the Thorpe home. Marion listened to the report, her eyes glowing.

"Good work, lad! It means that Bernstein will be on his way to-night."

"Sure! And alone, unless I'm all off on figuring. But it doesn't pay to be too certain of it. The gang has drifters and Bernstein may get hold of a few before he starts from here."

At that juncture he was obliged to respond gratefully to an urgent invitation extended by Mrs. Thorpe, who entered the sitting room.

"I'll be mighty glad to stay to supper and loaf around here for the first part of the evening," he assured the hostess. "The less I advertise I'm in town, the better it may be."

"And I'll arrange for you to get news bulletins from the equine invalids," affirmed Marion gayly.

## CHAPTER VI.

## A RIDE INTO THE NIGHT.

MARION'S small brother served as bulletineer during the evening. To his urchin's taste the job was like a highly flavored candy ball. At last he had been appointed a detective of the State patrol!

No sleuth could have tiptoed more furtively by roundabout ways between the Thorpe house and the tavern, taking advantage of every shadow, though the messenger would have been less conspicuous if he trotted along in his usual style of doing errands.

From this aid Gaylord learned, in verbal bulletins, delivered at intervals, that the horses were up, were staggering around the yard in the tow of the hostler, working off their torpor.

Finally, they were eating oats.

When this last report was delivered, Matt sent a note by the lad to Bowen. The latter was requested to send the officer's uniform to the Thorpe home. When the youngster brought the garments he also fetched news that the big trunks were being loaded on the drummer's wagon.

Gaylord ran upstairs to the spare room and hastily garbed himself in regulation togs. He had been carrying his weapons strapped under the borrowed coat. Whatever happened, he did not intend to have the smuggler make claim that he had defended himself against a supposed hijacker—an excuse that might be some defense for attack on a man who was not in uniform.

When the officer reappeared in the sitting room, twitching up the gauntlets of his gloves, the lad surveyed him admiringly.

"I've sure had an elegant time detecting for you. But it's just as Marion said while you was upstairs—the big thing in your job ain't pussyfooting around, but it's in getting out and grab-

bing 'em. You're what I'm going to be when I grow up."

"Never—no way—nohow!" declared Mother Thorpe emphatically. "Matt, I'm praising the Lord for what you told Marion to-day about your new plans."

Matt settled his weapons over his hips and patted his belt with its two guns.

"I'll join you in your praising, Mother Thorpe, when I can hang this thing on the wall and look at it without being ashamed as a quitter. And speaking of Marion, young man, where's your sister?"

"She went into her room to get a cape; she's going out to the stable with you. Guess I'll go, too, to give you a good send-off."

But his sister, appearing soon, wrapped in an outer garment, informed Master Thorpe with emphasis that his presence at the stable was not desired. This seemed to be the natural impulse of a fiancée seeking a few moments of privacy with a lover bound on a mission, and the mother beamed her approval and hushed the resentful youngster.

Marion hastily led the retreat from the house, and was ahead of Matt in rolling open the stable door.

Earlier in the evening she had made an errand to the stable, saying that she wanted to be sure that the chestnut was in fit shape after his run on the trail of Banton.

Using his flash light, Matt perceived that not only the chestnut had been saddled but that Black Betty was ready for the road.

He glanced inquiringly at Marion.

"I thought I'd have them ready for a quick start," she said quietly.

"Leaving me to make my choice, eh? Well, I'll ride the chestnut. He's the steadier of the two, and I didn't take too much out of him to-day."

Still quietly matter of fact, she returned:

"You haven't any choice in the mat-

ter, big boy, because I saddled Black Betty for myself."

She threw off the shrouding cape. She wore riding breeches, boots and held a crop in her hand. From the wall of the stable she jerked a cap off a peg and pulled it down over her curls.

She smiled at his open-mouthed amazement.

"I'm going along with you, Matt, dear."

"Not by a——"

She shook the crop under his nose, and he broke off his emphatic declaration and backed away.

"It's nothing to use profanity about," she said tartly. "Even if you're mean about it and don't let me go along with you, I shall most certainly follow. You won't be a gallant gentleman if you leave me to chase along alone in the night. But you're always gallant, and so I'm sure you'll take me with you."

"Good mighty!" he lamented. "You're leaving me no other choice, unless I tie you up with a halter and leave you here."

"I'll put some marks across your face with this whip before I'll let you tie me," she retorted, in mock savageness.

"But your mother will be scared into fits if you don't come back to the house."

"I'll call to her when we ride past the window."

"And then she'll think I'm a renegade for letting you go."

"You can call to her, too, and tell her you couldn't help yourself," she suggested. "Look, Matt. Is your job to-night really so very dangerous? If it is, perhaps I'll turn into a real fool of a girl and go into tantrums and hang onto your neck and stop you from going. That would be terrible, eh?"

"You wouldn't do it."

"Oh, I might, especially if you act mean about letting me go with you," she taunted. "I have a responsibility in this thing, you know. I stopped you

from taking Kenny Gage with you. If I can't do anything else for help, I can hide behind a tree and pop a few shots when you show yourself to Bernstein to make the arrest. He must be made to know he's covered. But we're wasting time, lad. Onto your horse and lead the way!"

There was sense in what she had just said, he realized in spite of his repugnance to her plan. He hesitated.

She urged him again with impatience while he pondered. Without his aid she swung herself to the saddle. He could not leave her behind, to ride alone. He knew she would follow. That girl had often proved to him that action followed briskly on her promise.

They rode out of the stable.

When Marion halted in front of the house and called out her intention, Mrs. Thorpe's horrified visage was framed in the window.

"And I can't help myself, Mother Thorpe," supplemented Gaylord. "But I'll promise that nothing happens to her."

"Go to it, sis! You're all to the good and I only wish I was growed up, too," squeaked the brother, squeezing at his mother's side. "Bore him with one for me, if he gets nasty. He cuffed my ears when I went into the stable, detecting."

They rode away in haste, leaving behind a sharp division of opinion in the Thorpe family.

"We'd better take a last look at the tavern premises," murmured the officer, slowing his horse to a walk and permitting the girl to come close alongside. "We can make sure that Bernstein hasn't started and see whether he has picked up any of his gang."

This espionage was easy; the stable yard was lighted and the observers could survey from a safe distance.

The horses had been put to the loaded wagon and Bernstein was stroking their muzzles, urging them to brace up. He

was alone except for the hostler and Bowen.

"I reckon it has only been a touch of the spring tired feeling, like we all have," Dan assured the guest, cheerily vociferous.

"I'd like to think it hasn't been somebody's dirty work!" rasped the other. "The vet diagnosed it as dope."

"So as to work a good fee out of you, that's all," insisted Bowen. "Doc always does that to a stranger when he thinks it can be done. This night air will whiff all the fogs out o' them hosses' noddles, don't worry."

The two in the shadows observed that Bernstein seated himself carefully when he mounted the wagon. He worked his hands behind him, at his hips, before he lifted the reins to start the horses.

"Two guns," whispered Matt to the girl. "He can't pull as quick as if he carried a holster under his arm. Now we'll beat it for the open road."

They walked the horses up a transverse street, cantered along a road parallel to the main thoroughfare, and came onto the stage turnpike beyond the outskirts of the village.

"All towns this side of the county line are incorporated," Matt reminded his companion. "We can't tackle him till he gets over into a wild-land township."

"Thank you for saying 'we,' Mister Officer."

"And I'll lay off saying anything more about your coming along," declared the husband-elect. "I suppose I may as well get used to your bossing." He softened the rebuke with a chuckle. Then he put out his hand and her hand met his enthusiastically. "It's a big thing for a chap to get a girl like you, Marion. I can't help thinking of poor Ken, going off like I am, holding him out of this job. But I'm saying right now that I'm not dropping him as a friend. By gad, I don't intend to let

Elsa and the gang get him. He may be weak but there's good in him."

"That's man-talk, and I like it," Marion assured him. "Lad, it's wonderful when a man does a grand job because a woman inspires him. It's a proof of his love. I suppose it's also a proof of love when the man allows a woman to work on him and influence him away from the grand thing. He is trying to please her, at any rate. But Kenny must be made to wake up and understand better."

"I'll take it on myself to wake him up, dear. I know all about how dangerous it is, stepping between a man and his wife. But Ken, as I know him, deserves the risks. In the meantime, there's another kind of a job ahead of us."

The stars were bright in a sky without clouds. He could see a cased weapon slung at the pommel of her saddle. "Aha! The trusty rifle."

"Of course. Here's hoping it won't be called on to bark, even. But if it has to bite—well, the calf of the leg is where a good watchdog grabs usually."

"I reckon you're able to pick your place, after what you've said about your target work inside the magpie," he said dryly.

The horses responded to the touch of heels and cantered down the turnpike side by side.

There was plenty of time, the riders knew. Behind them a heavily loaded wagon, pulled by a pair of horses newly roused from dope dreamland, would be making slow time.

Therefore, Matt used his complete knowledge of byways and parallel roads. Where there were wooded sections bordering the highway, the two riders left the turnpike. This was a precaution against the hazards of ambush, provided the smuggler had made doubly sure by using some other agency to secure helpers, not depending on Banton's word-o'-mouth relayed message. Furthermore,

the detours by the pair afforded an opportunity for some cautious scouting.

Matt's woodsman's senses were constantly on the alert.

Therefore, when he finally sniffed the scent from dying embers, he guessed at the proximity of a cook fire which had been used and abandoned. There was chill in the evening air, and campers for the night might be expected to keep a blaze going.

He heard the tinkle of a brook and reined his mount in that direction, Marion's horse stepping along with nose at the leader's flank. Woods rovers, the officer knew, would build their cook fire close to a brook.

He followed up the course of the little stream and perceived the dull glow of coals. Little flames occasionally flicked up and lighted the surroundings. No persons, either sleeping or awake, were visible.

"Stay here," he commanded Marion in a whisper.

He dismounted and put the bridle rein of the chestnut in her hand. He went to the dying fire, picked up a discarded tin can and doused the embers with water dipped from the brook. With a stick he dug into the bed of coals and thoroughly wet down the fire with canful after canful of water, making sure that every spark was dead. It was the work of a trained woodsman, killing the chances of a blaze eating its way through duff and roots and eventually setting the woods on fire.

Returning to the girl, he said in low tones:

"The way that fire was left shows it was used by men who don't know their woods stuff. City greenies or employment-agency bohunks bound to or from the choppings."

"Perhaps some of the gang's gunmen," she suggested apprehensively.

"Of course, we've got to figure on all such possibilities, Marion. I mustn't use the flash light to hunt for trail signs.

We'll just have to mouse along, hoping the gunmen didn't get the word."

At last they came again into the turnpike where it crossed open ground. Matt set the pace of a canter for several miles, until they had passed a roadside sign on a post, braced by a heap of stones. The post marked the county line. They were at last on unorganized territory.

"I'm on my own stamping ground now," he assured Marion. "So we'll pick our place to tackle our man."

They rode along until they came once more to trees that crowded close to the roadway.

"I have made my plans," the officer informed the girl. "I think I know the best place to nail him."

They reached a stretch where a steep bank shouldered close to the highway. At one point a big ash tree leaned over the road, clinging to the bank with sturdy roots. A branch half as large as the trunk stretched low over the turnpike.

Matt stopped his horse beneath the branch.

"Here's my plan," he informed his anxious companion. "I'll perch on this big limb, lying flat. When he's squarely under me, I'll drop on him. I believe it's a surer way than stepping out and ordering, 'Hands up!' It's pretty dark and he might be able to pull a gun before I could spot the trick. And he may have his shooter beside him on the seat. Yes, the quick drop from that limb is the thing."

She nodded acquiescence, though her eyes were wide with concern for him.

"Now we'll ride along to where there's an easy slope of this bank."

After a few rods they came to a place where an ascent could be made, and the horses scrambled up.

He led the way back to the location of the leaning tree. While he was dismounting he heard the dull popping of the ball-and-socket fastenings of her

rifle case. She had the weapon in her hands when he looked up at her.

"Oh, I know you can handle him all right in the clinch, Matt! But if there happen to be any others, I'll take care of 'em."

"I'm still hoping the cook fire was only for fool fishermen or hobo choppers." He patted the rifle. "But we must be ready for most anything."

"The magazine is full. I'll make 'em think an army is up here," she declared, clicking her teeth.

"Make sure the nags don't bolt. I know they're steady under gunfire, but you'll hear a catamount screech when I drop. I'd rather scare him to death than shoot him."

He left her, slid down the slope to the foot of the tree and ran up the leaning trunk on hands and feet, ape fashion. He ventured forth on the stout limb till he was directly over the middle of the road. Then he lay prostrate, hooking arms and legs around the support. The girl could barely distinguish what seemed to be a swelling of the tree branch. In spite of her anxiety, she was comforted by the reflection that Bernstein, undoubtedly, would see nothing which would forewarn him or cause him to pull a gun before he arrived beneath the branch.

So they awaited their man.

## CHAPTER VII.

### HELL TINDER.

AT last the man they were waiting for approached the rendezvous which he had had no share in planning.

The two in ambush heard the thumping of horses' feet. The animals were trotting along the level stretch beyond the trees which concealed them from the officer and the girl.

Then the hitch came into view, and the pair slowed into a walk to mount the grade leading to the ash tree. Matt had chosen his perch with the knowl-

edge that Bernstein would be obliged to walk his nags on that section of the road.

Bernstein was whistling the air of a popular song.

Matt was divided in opinion about that whistling. It might be for the sake of keeping up courage or it might be an expression of relief because Bernstein had come thus far without interference.

Evidently, the man was still relying on Banton's promised aid, because he ceased from whistling the tune and piped a shriller whistle with fingers between his lips, so the officer judged.

It was easy to figure that Mr. Bernstein was now wholly disarmed of doubts! Never did a lamb approach more serenely to the slaughter. When he arrived under the ash tree, taking advantage of the slow pace of the horses, Bernstein had the reins nipped between his knees and was lighting a cigar.

Matt loosed his clutch and dropped. In mid-air he let out a catamount yell.

He landed on a soggy victim whose every muscle was lax in amazed affright. Matt had Bernstein off the seat and was astraddle his captive by the side of the road before the man realized that he had been attacked by a man, not by a wild animal.

The horses, equally terrified, shied to one side, leaped frantically, and one of them got a hind leg over the pole and fell, dragging down the other.

It was a crisis to be dealt with instantly, and the officer did not take time to tie up his captive. Instead, he yanked Bernstein to his feet, rushed him along to the struggling horses and jounced him down upon the head of the nag that was making the most vicious efforts to rise and free himself. The captor disarmed the prisoner.

"You dare get up off that horse and I'll knock your block six ways from Sunday!" bellowed the officer. He

leaped to the pole to free the traces. "Shut up, Bernstein, if that's your right name!" Matt shouted, breaking into the man's ravings. "This is no hijacking job. I am Matt Gaylord of the State patrol and you're under arrest. Keep your sitting, I tell you!"

He was depending on the prisoner's fright and flabby nonresistance. Bernstein was cowering where he sat, holding down the horse's head.

The captor unhooked the traces of that horse. Then he proceeded to attend to the case of the other, and quieter, animal.

Bernstein desperately grabbed an opportunity. He flung himself from the prostrate head to the horse's shoulders. When the freed animal scrambled to its feet, Bernstein slid over his leg, under the lift of the shoulders, set his arms about the horse's neck in a bear hug and was carried off in the brute's mad rush, away from this scene of devil to pay.

The runaway did not hold to the road, but leaped away into the woods.

Matt pulled both his guns, but he did not fire. He realized that he would merely be plugging his lead into trees which were thickly set between him and the quarry.

However, the girl poured a fusillade from the top of the acclivity, on the chance of making a bullet effective in spite of the tree screen. In a few moments she arrived on the rush, riding Black Betty and leading the chestnut.

"I just couldn't help trying to get him, Matt!" she cried in half apology. "Even though he was among the trees before I realized he was on that horse."

"I reckon we'll have to let him go," he admitted ruefully. "He's a needle in a haystack by this time. It's too black under those trees."

"But if you do think there's any chance of locating him, don't mind about me," she proffered bravely. "I'll stay here and guard the trunks."

But he promptly turned down the

suggestion. Though he did not speak his mind, he felt that her shooting had given the alarm to Bernstein's side partners, if such persons were in that locality and were responsible for the cook fire.

"We have the contraband goods, Marion, and that's enough of a haul for one night. The man doesn't matter so much. He isn't the big mogul. The brains of that gang does the thinking and planning, not the smuggling. It's a mean job to put Chestnut Boy to, but I'll have to hitch him up with this other horse so we can get this stuff back to Quossoc."

"I had no business shooting as I did," she lamented. "That man was whistling signals."

"Depending on the fake word from Banton, so I figure it," he said for her reassurance. "We'll hope so while we're getting this stuff to cover."

When he had got the fallen horse on its feet, he quieted the animal, and the brute was further calmed by the steadiness of the chestnut when the latter had been hitched in on the other side of the pole. Gaylord used for his makeshift harness the ropes with which the trunks were lashed on the wagon.

He mounted to the seat and reined his team, the cut-under forewheels enabling him to make a short turn for heading about toward the village. He carried a gun, along with the reins, in his hands while he drove. Marion rode beside the wagon, on the alert, her rifle in the hook of her arm.

However, they were unmolested during the ride back to Quossoc.

"I was nigh forgetting all about the man Banton," said Matt at the edge of the village. "So we do have a prisoner, after all. He may be worth more to the case than the chap who got away. Bernstein is only the toter of stuff after it has been smuggled over the border. Banton must be in closer with the real gang of handlers."

He pondered for some time, then spoke out again:

"But, of course, Banton won't squeal—not to the law. But if he gets his chance he'll advertise me in good shape to the high-ups. I'm needing the advertising if I'm going to pull the grand kibosh onto my trail and close enough to me so I'll be able to grab him."

"I'm thinking Bernstein will attend to it sufficiently well," was her blunt opinion. "You certainly spoke out good and loud in telling him who you were!"

There was rebuke on the countenance she turned to his gaze; a street light revealed her expression.

He grinned. "I wasn't thinking he'd be getting away to spread the glad news. Perhaps if I had known he'd get away, I might have declared myself even louder."

"You're deliberately coaxing them onto your trail, Matt," she protested.

"As I've told you before—yes. Otherwise, it'll continue to be only pancake stuff for me, pulling in a straggler here and there, shooting it out now and then with a hophead gunman. Those jobs won't bring you and me any closer to the wedding day, Marion."

"Yes, I know, Matt," she admitted resignedly. "You'll never have peace of mind if you don't put the big job over."

"No, nor self-respect, pal o' mine." Then he laughed. "Honestly, I'm glad now because Bernstein skedaddled. If I had been looking ahead to the main point I might have planned to tie a can to him and send him scooting." He smiled more broadly at her under the next street light. "If it didn't stand as it does stand now, with Bernstein foot-loose to pass the word, I'd have to double cross the service a bit."

He replied to the startled query in her eyes.

"I mean, Banton would have to do the advertising. He really isn't officially arrested. Pete Saucier is only putting him up for the night in a

friendly way. I could set Banton loose in the morning and let him get word to the main squeeze about what kind of a butter-in I am."

"There's such a thing as fine bravery, of course. On the other hand, there's also foolhardy recklessness," she rebuked.

"I don't mean it that way," he insisted. "Of course, a real long-headed chap might be able to think out another scheme for bringing the big mogul into close grips—get him up here on my side of the border where I could know him for what he is and get my clamp on him. Being short on tricks and long on action, if I have to say it for myself, I have to use the hammer-and-tongs style."

"Marion, it's just as I have said to Kenny Gage—it's not to their interest to kill me off, and that's why they're not trying to get me that way. The high-up who does their thinking knows well enough that this State would make a special slam along the border if gunmen nailed me. Not simply because I'm Matt Gaylord, being nothing much to put pieces in the newspapers about, but because the State patrol service is now being put to the test."

"The Kerwin case is bad enough—worse, as it looks on the outside, because the boss at the State house is holding off by my asking him to do it just now. But if a chief ranger is killed, on top of what has been happening up here, the State will have to go in whole hog to smash the gang, else the scandal will smash the service. Too much gab from me, I realize, Marion, but I reckon the air has been cleared up a little between us."

"I did understand fairly well, Matt, but I'm glad you have put it in words. They'll be trying something on you, however. What are you looking for?"

"I'm trying to look all ways at once—and I keep guessing. But I can't look inside the head of their 'Mister Wiseman.'"

"Do you suppose he is so awfully wise?"

"Well, he has to be mighty smart, at any rate. The tricks they are putting over up here show good thinking by somebody—and the money behind the thing proves how big the chief planner must be to hold his job."

They arrived in front of the Thorpe home while they were talking. Though it was after midnight light showed behind the drawn curtains of the sitting room.

"Poor mother!" sighed the girl. She rode close to the window and tapped on the glass.

"It's Marion, mammy, dear! We're back, safe and sound."

The window shade snapped clear to the lintel, its bang like an exclamation of delight. Mrs. Thorpe hoisted the lower sash. "I knew Matt wouldn't let harm come to you, but I have worried so, darling!"

The officer leaped down from the wagon and went to the window.

"And the job has been put over, Mother Thorpe, to the queen's taste—and here's the queen." He put his arm about the girl's shoulders and pulled her close to him. "We'll tell you all about it in the morning."

The mother directed their attention to the divan where the small brother was curled up, asleep.

"I couldn't coax him to go to bed. He went to sleep with his head on my knee. I'll carry him upstairs now. Thank Heaven, you're back all safe. We'll talk in the morning, children. The spare room is ready for you, Matt."

"Just a moment!" pleaded the officer. "I want to ask permission to store those trunks in the cellar temporarily. You can guess what's in 'em."

"You have full liberty on my premises, Matt." She reached high and eclipsed her beaming visage with the drawn shade.

Marion held the flash light and he

eased the trunks down from the wagon and dragged them across the yard to the rollway, where he lifted the double doors when Marion, going within the house for the errand, had pulled the bolts securing the cellar entrance.

Then he bumped the trunks, one after the other, down the stone steps, onto the cement floor.

He lowered the rollway doors and bolted them.

Now that operations were screened by the doors, he snapped on the electric light in the basement.

"We know well enough what's in these trunks, Marion, but we'll sleep better after we make sure."

He took the furnace poker and smashed the locks of the trunks.

In the upper tills were samples of Bernstein's wares. But other tills yielded many parcels which were wrapped neatly in oiled fabric. He slit open one package and revealed to her little white cubes.

"It's 'snow,' and a lot of it." He surveyed the stacked parcels and out of his experience made a quick estimate. "Figuring by retail prices, at least fifty thousand dollars' worth."

"No wonder men turn into tigers, handling it, making such profits," she commented.

He proceeded to pack the packages into the tills. "And the addicts who are after the money to buy the stuff are just as savage tigers, with robberies, killings, holdups—any way to get it!"

"Well, there's this much less hell tinder to be scattered around the country, Matt. We can sleep easier after a good job, even if Bernstein did get away."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A WOMAN IN THE GEARS.

**G**AYLORD was up in the earliest light of dawn. When he said his good night to the girl he told her that he would look after Banton and

then come to the Thorpe home for breakfast.

He tiptoed out of the house, saddled the chestnut and sent his mount cantering along the Douglass road.

At the Saucier shack Matt found Pete "barking" ash stock in his yard.

"*Oui!* Oh, yas! Your frien', I look after heem, all so nice! Feed heem with vit'tul off de spoon. He yap too moch so I tie op hees jaw."

"He tried to hire you to let him go, of course."

"Oh, *oui*," returned Pete indifferently. "Started wit' ten dollaire, went op to hunder' and den I tie op hees jaw."

"You're *tres bon homme*, Pete. I knew he was safer with you than in jail." He slapped Pete's shoulder. "You're just what you always have been—as square a shooter as I know."

"And dat talk from you," declared Hermit Pete, his eyes misty, "she sure be better as de hunder' dollaire. And as for de hunder' dollaire, I have de damn fine beeznass." He flourished his hand to indicate his domain. With a grin he added, taking the edge off what might appear to be superhuman integrity: "And eef I tak' de hunder' dollaire, I t'ink soch a devil he would come back wit' odder devils like heem and burn ma feet to mak' me dig op and he tak' dat monee back."

"A chap can't be too careful, living here alone like you do," agreed Matt, putting a friendly arm across Pete's shoulders. "Of course, you're lying about why you wouldn't take the bribe," he added, chuckling. "But you never could tell the truth about anything."

After that excellent understanding they went into the cabin.

The officer released Banton from his bonds. The man grunted oaths while he chafed his numb and stiffened arms.

"Go ahead and ease your mind," advised Matt cheerfully. "Kindly note that I'm here this morning in uniform.

I arrest you officially.. And you remember me now, I reckon."

With more profanity Banton admitted the recognition.

"But what in hell are you arresting me for?" he bluffed.

"Can't guess, hey?" the officer drawled, adopting the tone and manner he used on the Castol trail.

"Of course I can't guess."

"You're as bad a liar as Pete Saucier is," commented Matt, continuing a jest in which Pete was finding extreme relish. "But no matter. I suppose it comes from associating with Pete all one night. Now shut up, Banton, or whatever your name is. I'm reporting to you that I have tackled your pal Bernstein, or whatever his name is. You may as well know the inside. I faked a message from you to him—had him informed that you were thrown off the stage horse but would get to Dowling's and send a gang. So he rode off into the night on the say-so."

Banton swore more furiously.

"Oh, yes! I know how bad I've put you in with your accomplice," pursued the officer. "That's what I'm out to do up here—set all you rabs by the ears if I can. But you won't be embarrassed by meeting him in the jail where I'll be taking you."

"You can't jam *me* into jail, I tell you. You have nothing on me."

"Izzat so?" queried Matt provokingly. "Look, man! I don't mind telling you that Bernstein got away from me."

The prisoner emitted a yelp of great relief.

"But, on the other hand," the officer went on relentlessly, "I grabbed something more worth while than Bernstein. I got those trunks. You know what's in 'em. You helped put it there. There's plenty of proof along that line. And that's why you are under arrest, and why a United States deputy marshal will be coming up here to give you a free ride to Federal headquarters."

He stared into the gray, rigid countenance of his prisoner.

"It's dirty business you've been in, man. You're going to be out of it for some time. Too bad the big gazook can sit back all safe and have you understrappers take all the knocks. But he'll be nailed pretty quick."

Banton closed his mouth, pressing his lips together. But his eyes opened more widely.

Matt had no expectation of getting anything special out of the agent, but persisted in his worrying tactics because a man who had been jumped hard might drop something in spite of himself.

"The big fellow, himself, is up this way. Did you know it?"

"Why hand me that guff?" Banton sneered.

"Because I know what I'm talkin' about. I have seen him. He's a stocky, red-faced man. Looks something like Bernstein."

In spite of dolor and caution, Banton was forced into a laugh of scorn. The officer's bland certainty provoked the derisive snicker.

Matt checked off his mental list of stout, red-faced men.

"And a guy as old as he is ought to be thinking of the hereafter. The poor devils he's sending to hell will be waiting for him with red-hot pitchforks."

Banton's mocking laughter informed the officer that elderly men could be checked off, also. He blurted:

"If you're so damnation sure I'm off in this thing, what does your boss look like, anyway?"

"You ought to carry your brains in your head instead of in your boots," derided the prisoner. "You'd have fewer bunions on your brains and less headache."

"For that crack I'll have the turnkey put you in a dark cell on the lower tier," said Matt, affecting wrath, though he was measurably satisfied with what he had gleaned. "I overheard you hol-

lering for a dark room at the Quossooc tavern, and I hope you'll like what you get at the Quossooc jail."

He marched Banton out of the cabin and ordered him to walk ahead of the horse.

"You must feel a little stiff," Matt suggested caustically. "The walk from here to the jail will limber you up."

They went in silence, Banton plodding doggedly ahead of the walking chestnut.

After the prisoner had been lodged in the village jail, Matt wired to Federal headquarters his report of the arrest of Banton. He also reported the seizing of contraband narcotics and stated that he would release the prisoner and the goods to government officers. He left the Bernstein affair as it stood, making no mention of the latter. Then he went to the Thorpe house for breakfast.

"So the big kibosh isn't short and stout, he isn't old, he isn't red-faced," he stated after he told Marion the events of the morning. "Not so awful much to find out, I know, but it does snug the big hunt down a bit."

Later, in the sitting room, where they were alone, he informed her that he must go at once to Kenny Gage, because the latter would soon hear that a prisoner had been brought in by the chief.

"The fact that I've been working without him will most likely start something between us—and out of the talk may come some help for me in sizing him up and finding how much Elsa has twisted him. She has had plenty of time to try her new stuff on him." He detected anxiety in Marion's eyes. "Don't worry, pal. I won't be telling him too much. If Ken is going wrong I won't be handing him anything Elsa can pass along to my hurt."

Matt walked to Gage's home on the edge of the village. Elsa Gage opened the door after he had knocked. For a

few moments after their reserved greetings, she blocked the portal.

She was pretty, no gainsaying that! But her lips betrayed willfulness, weakness and habitual cajolery. Hers was no straightforward gaze; she surveyed the caller from under drooping lids, tipping back her head.

"You haven't been a bit neighborly, 'Handsome.' Ken has been wondering about the why of it."

"I've been busy," he returned, his aloofness not melting under her coquetry.

Her pout was accentuated. "So we have heard. Somebody saw you taking a prisoner into the jail and told Ken. So he's mad at you, Mister Chief."

Not rudely but with decision he stepped past her and went into the house.

He saw Gage through the open door of the sitting room, and entered, putting out his hand, disregarding the brother officer's sour reluctance in taking the hand.

Elsa followed Matt into the room and sat down with the composure of one who intended to remain.

Matt glanced over his shoulder at her, wrinkling his forehead, but he immediately turned to face his friend when the latter growled:

"What for are you dumping me all of a sudden, doing this last job by yourself?"

"It happened to fall that way, Ken," lied the chief. But he was not convincing in tone or expression and the other grumbled his doubts.

Matt went on:

"He's only that rab we met on the Castol trail, and I picked him up on general suspicion. From what you said when we left him, I took it you thought I was too suspicious in his case. So I thought you wouldn't be specially interested in helping me take him. And I didn't need any help, for that matter." He turned and bowed slightly to Gage's

wife. "Furthermore, I thought I'd be real generous by giving you extra time with Elsa."

"Oh, you're handing me guff, Matt!" broke in Gage petulantly. "What's it all about, anyway?"

"It's nothing special, mate. But perhaps it won't hurt anything to have a little private talk." Again he glanced at the wife.

She bridled instantly. "Now it's high time for me to ask what it's all about. My husband doesn't keep me out of his business, any more than I keep him out of mine."

Matt was silent, fingering his ear, wondering how deeply she had taken Kenny into some of her latest concerns.

The latter spoke out:

"What she says is O. K. Go ahead and talk." It was said with the truculence Gage had showed previously when the two men had crossed words in the woods.

Therefore, the conference did not begin auspiciously. Matt felt that he was barred from bringing Marion into the affair. He could not properly mention the fact that Elsa had been settling accounts with hundred-dollar bank notes. He could not hazard suspicions that she had been taking the tainted money of the gang. Again he was wondering how much Gage knew about this matter of finances. If he did know, Matt would be muddling conditions worse by referring to the thing. The two of them had the upper hands at that juncture, and he knew it; he was at a disadvantage and revealed the fact by his embarrassment.

Touchy business, this friendship affair!

More touchy still, any meddling in the relations of husband and wife.

He sat down, twiddled his thumbs and stammered when he declared:

"Oh, I've only dropped in for a social call, folks. Phil has reported to me from headquarters, Ken, so every-

thing will be taken care of for a few days. I'll be looking after a few things down this way, so you can take it easy here at home till I call on you."

"That's only more guff, Matt," insisted Gage. "You came in here with something special on your mind. Unload, I tell you!"

Matt jumped to his feet, eager to escape.

"I've already unloaded, telling you how you can have a few more days at home. And you haven't even thanked me." He started for the door.

"But you're still holding me out of any jobs you have on down here! What's the big idea?"

The flash came to Gaylord that he would do well to hold the mate out of jobs in that village, or possibly at Dowling's place, until it could be made certain that Elsa had not pulled Ken into any hitch-up with the gang. Even friendship's loyalty was not proof against a feeling that was akin to a hunch.

Gage, so his superior knew, was not actually wicked, but he certainly was weak.

Elsa rose and went to her husband, standing beside him, scuffling beringed fingers through his hair till he blinked up adoringly at her.

An untranslatable smile wreathed her lips. It was a dangerous smile, though Matt did not realize how dangerous it was. She said: )

"You seem to be uppish and offish to-day, Handsome."

He winced at the nickname; a flush of protest dyed his tanned cheeks.

"Always before you have been so very nice to me, Matt," she purred. "And a little while ago you wanted to send me out of the room. Ken has asked you, 'What's the big idea?' I ask you the same."

"I don't know what you're talking about," the caller protested.

"You're not a teeny mite jealous, are

you, because I'm making so much of Ken, with you looking on?"

There was malice in her tone. He detected the evil mockery and his indignation flared.

"Why should a man be jealous of his best friend's wife?"

"Oh, men are queer, I've found out. They get vain and selfish and want everything for themselves. But I guess I'll be prudent and keep still." Again that mocking smile!

Gage glowered at his friend. "I don't have to tell you, Matt, what's the dirtiest play any man can make in this world."

Gaylord stepped back toward the pair.

"You'll have to tell me what you mean, saying that!"

Gage flipped his hand.

"Oh, you haven't loosened up to me about what you came here for. I can be just as mum when you ask questions. I've passed a word to the wise. Let it go at that." Elsa dropped her hand beside his cheek, her forearm resting on his head. He pulled the hand to his lips and kissed it. "And I'm not such a damned fool, either!" he snapped, turning again to Matt.

The latter blazed then, in earnest.

"That word about yourself doesn't go with me, Gage. All of a sudden you have turned into a fool, judging by the talk you've just made. I'm too polite to say what I think of your wife, along the same line. I'm bidding the both of you good morning."

He hurried out of the house, slamming the door. They had been asking him about "the big idea." Now he was asking the question of himself.

Evidently he had a lot to learn about the tricks of womankind. He hurried back to Marion Thorpe in order to get some inside tips regarding the sex.

He rather expected that the girl would ridicule Elsa as a nincompoop whose strategy was too silly to merit attention.

But Marion was grave after she had listened.

"I'll admit that she's a fool, Matt, as you say. But fools are sometimes the most dangerous. And a woman fool, allowing herself to go by instinct, is ten times more dangerous than a woman of sense, because a sensible woman does follow some rules of ethics. A woman like Elsa knows by instinct how to set men at each other's throats, fighting like savage bulldogs. You have the sense to see into the thing. You won't fight Ken."

"I'll say I won't. Not by any of her stirring."

"But she's in a position to make Ken turn on you. There's something bigger than she is that's behind it, Matt. She knows how to operate. But somebody else has told her to do it. You're proof against their cash and lead. If something else is tried, you must get ready to meet it. It may be harder to deal with than lead and cash. It looks to me as if brains had got behind their schemes regarding you."

"The big mogul is really up here, perhaps, giving off his orders," was his hopeful suggestion. "Using his whip. Well, last night's grab-off may put the real snapper on the lash. Marion, before I sleep to-night I'll be going over to Dowling's place. I may pick up something there."

"But they'll know you in any kind of a disguise, Matt!" she cried, horrified.

"I won't try any soft-shoe stuff. I don't know how. It isn't my style." He was stressing his repugnance to snooping tactics. "I'll go in my uniform, just as I have done in past times. I have a right to walk into Dowling's, provided I stay on the State's side of the boundary line."

The girl required no explanation of the conditions at Dowling's. The line between Canada and the United States crossed through the big room of the re-

sort and was marked by a painted line. One who stepped to the Canadian side of the line to visit the bar was said to be in "Yurrup."

Dowling's was only one of many similar places where such boundary conditions existed. The present law, it may be stated, does not permit the erection of new buildings on the border line, but the law is not retroactive as to the buildings erected before the law became operative.

"I'm telling you again, they won't shoot me," he assured her. "At least, they'll be waiting to see how well the latest scheme works." He grinned. "And a woman is only a woman, even with somebody's brains to steer her. That doesn't apply to you, pal."

He embraced her and went out on duty, intending to make a general survey of Quossooc, its transients, its conditions; also, to make inquiries regarding the doings at Dowling's.

#### CHAPTER IX. A CITY SLICKER.

**G**AYLORD had temporarily stabled the Bernstein horse at the Thorpe place. Going into the village, he led the animal to the tavern stable and quizzed the hostler.

"The critter belongs to Alf Trufant's livery at Waller Junction," stated the hostler out of his extensive knowledge. He understood the situation when Matt came in with the horse. "Seized, hey? More smuggling, hey? It's too bad for Alf to lose a hitch. Of course, he didn't know it was a smuggling job."

"Trufant will get his rig back from me, all right—what's left of it. And I'm hoping the other horse will be turned in."

The officer immediately went about swapping generosity for news.

From Landlord Bowen's private office he called the Trufant stable and tersely stated the situation to the proprietor, adding:

"But I'll be liberal, Alf. I won't confiscate the outfit owned by an innocent party. On the other hand, I'm asking you to be as liberal. Notify Dan Bowen as soon as the horse shows up."

Trufant had been prompt in reporting that he had not yet seen the animal.

"Yassir, you bet I will!"

"If Bernstein blows in with the horse, have your local deputy sheriff grab him."

"You betcha!"

Matt hung up and reflected that he had received a tip, so far as it went. Bernstein had had plenty of time to reach Waller Junction so as to catch a train.

If he had not grabbed the opportunity to escape, it was more than probable that he had lurked in the woods until daylight and was staying on in the locality where his treasure was. This would be the natural procedure, even though the recovery of that treasure might be hopelessly difficult. But, at all events—so ran Matt's reflections—the man would be anxious to report the calamity. Taking a long shot at possibility, the officer wanted to believe that the big mogul was really up that way, and that Bernstein was hazarding rearrest in order to get the news to his chief as soon as possible.

More than ever was Matt's interest hitched up with Dowling's place, the focus point for illicit dealings. But he made no display of that interest while he sauntered about the village, chatting with this man and that.

He met Kenny Gage on the street; the latter was out of uniform. The brother officer was sullen, though Matt greeted him cheerfully, with:

"I see you're making it a real lay-off, Ken, taking it easy in cits!"

"Why wear a uniform when I've been dumped?"

"But you're not dumped, mate. It's only because I haven't anything on just now where I'll be needing you."

Here was an opportunity for that private talk which had been hindered by Elsa. However, Matt was no longer in the mood for a conference. Gage was too manifestly hostile. "Why don't you say out what's on your mind?" said Gage. "I've come away from the house to give you your chance."

Hard lines settled around Gaylord's mouth, forcing away the friendly smile.

"I'll speak out one thing that's on my mind, Ken. What in the blue blazes is Elsa driving at?"

"By calling you 'Handsome' every other breath?" demanded the husband, his acrid jealousy flashing out.

"I've never figured you as a fool," Matt retorted hotly, "but I'll be doing so if you give me any more talk like that!"

He got a response to his own heat.

"But haven't you been figuring me as a fool for longer than I know? Damn ye, I think you have!"

Matt doubled his fist. Then he relaxed his fingers, made up a face of supreme disgust and walked away from this simpleton. Matt was remembering what Marion had said about the instinct of a woman fool. Here was a bomb planted under the friendship of good pals, and no mistake!

The main street of Quosso was a dangerous arena for settling this thing into an understanding; therefore, Matt quickened his steps when Gage followed, calling to his chief to hold up.

This tangle, Gaylord decided, must be unsnarled when he and Gage were again alone together in the woods, getting back upon the old and friendly plane where frank honesty could free all the knots.

At this moment, however, the bigger the crowd the better, Matt felt. He perceived his crowd. Down the street a score of loungers were gathered in front of a pitchman, who was declaiming and selling something from a portable stand.

Matt trotted, as if spurred by quick

interest, and wedged his way into the crowd, effectually bulwarking himself against Gage who had chased along.

The pitchman had a line of glib chatter and was holding his audience. He was dapper and cheeky, an exaggerated type of "city slicker."

For stock he had cheap jewelry. Such stuff invariably appeals to men of or near the woods. For added inducement this fellow ostentatiously wrapped numbered slips with each article he sold, and on a velvet-sheathed board he displayed gold-plated watches for which there would be a drawing of numbers later.

Except for the sake of keeping away from a run-in with Gage in his present mood, Matt would not have wasted his time with this frippery. As it was, he elbowed to the front rank and was an especial mark, his uniform conspicuous.

The pitchman babbled:

"And here comes the cop and he wants to know if I have my license for sales on the public streets."

"You're way off!" called a listener. "That's Matt Gaylord of the State patrol."

The salesman flipped a salute with mockery in his manner. He grinned into the officer's scowl. The proclamation of identity had stirred Matt's temper.

"Oh, well, Mister Patrol, I'm all safe. This stuff hasn't been smuggled, even though prices are so low. Buy a scarfpin and get a number that'll draw you a nice wrist watch for your best girl."

Men snickered. Matt's interest in the Thorpe girl had been well advertised in Quosoc.

The pitchman wrapped a pin and extended it.

"There's the lucky number. The general giggle tells me you have a best girl. Make her pleased with you as well as proud of you—all dressed up in your hotsy-totsy togs."

"Lay off that stuff," advised the officer menacingly.

"Boo!" said the big bear," taunted the cheeky chap. "But will he bite?"

Gaylord tipped back his head and squinted at the fellow. He detected an acid animosity in this cheap raillery. Something like a grudge taking advantage of a situation. He prolonged his veiled stare and noted that the man was a bit disconcerted. Whenever he discovered uneasiness in a person sharply scrutinized by an officer of the State patrol, Gaylord whetted his suspicion on general principles. That method had worked well in times past.

He stepped closer to the stand. The fellow flinched and Matt grunted, as if satisfied regarding something. He demanded vigorously:

"What's your other line outside of this fake stuff?"

But the chap was instantly on guard after his momentary embarrassment.

"I'm sorry to find you so touchy, officer. All the other boys here have stood for a little joshing." He spread his hands. "I'm trying to make a living with what you see in sight. That's all."

Matt heard mumbles in the crowd and realized that by this slick shift he was liable to get the tarred end of the stick in his own hand.

He backed away from the stand.

"I went a little too far, I'm afraid. So did you. Do you get me?" Stressing the question, he bored the chap with a gimlet stare and again noted the pitchman's discomposure. The man betrayed the manner of one who had awkwardly tipped over something and was ashamed of his carelessness..

Matt, turning to leave, snapped:

"Tongues do run away with good sense, if we ain't careful, mister."

He thrust his way out of the crowd, coming face to face with Gage on the outskirts.

"I'll be seeing you right away, Ken.

You'll be leaving the time of seeing you to *me*—do you understand?" There was significance in the query. Gage stepped to one side, and he did not follow Matt when the officer strode on his way.

Gaylord went to the tavern. Bowen was behind the counter. The officer tapped his finger on the registry book

"Which is the name of that jewelry faker, Dan—the dude who is peddling out yonder?"

"Oh, yes! I came past him a little spell ago. He isn't booked here, Matt."

"Do you know how he came into town?"

Bowen shook his head.

"I saw him walk in," stated an office loafer. "He had his kit on his back. Came out of the woods. Probably he's one of these hoofers, hiking it from camp to camp."

"Probably," Matt agreed. But privately he reflected that this manner of approach to Quossooc might be adopted by a transient, who wanted to slide in without giving a line on himself. The use of a stagecoach or a hitch would have helped to identify him.

Matt sat in the tavern office for a time, aware that it was a focal point for general information.

But those who entered and gossiped had only trivial matters for topics.

Near noon he again called Stableman Trufant on the telephone.

The lapse of time had given Bernstein his chance to return the horse, if it was in his mind to do so. Plenty of time, too, for the animal to find its way home if it had been abandoned.

No, the horse had not returned, Trufant reported ragefully. He asked if he might send a man on another horse to pair up the team and take the wagon back to Waller Junction. Gaylord gave permission, after a renewed pledge that Trufant would report to Bowen if the stray horse came in later. On the face of it, the situation indicated that Bern-

stein had wanted to go somewhere where he could go on horseback, so the officer decided. Matt wondered whether he had skirted the village on his way to Dowling's place. If so, there might be somebody there, above and outside of gangsters, to receive the report of a heavy loss along with the identity of the officer who had done the grabbing.

Matt had promised to return to the Thorpe home for the noon meal. He related faithfully to Marion the happenings of the forenoon.

"I expected nothing else from Kenny," she stated. "Elsa has him completely under her thumb. Are you still minded to keep him away from trouble?"

"Absolutely! I'm his friend, in spite of his foolishness right now. I know I can straighten out his ideas as soon as we're back in the woods."

"Why don't you send him back to join Phil at headquarters?"

"I'm afraid he won't obey."

"What! Won't obey orders from his chief?" she demanded with heat.

"She has poisoned his mind about me. Marion, he seems to think I'm double-crossing him where Elsa's concerned. By gad, you were right about the danger from a woman fool."

"I'd better go to Elsa and set her where she belongs," the girl declared, flushed, angry.

"I'm asking you to keep away from her, pal. It'll be a hateful job, a clinch with the woman she's showing herself to be. Leave me alone to handle it from another angle."

"Have you a plan?"

"No," he confessed. "I may have something in the way of a hunch. But it isn't much to speak about. I seem to be picking up nothing special in the village. As I've told you, I'll take a run over to Dowling's. I trust you'll lend me Chestnut Boy."

She nodded and asked:

"Are you going this afternoon?"

He wagged his head slowly.

"No, I think this evening will be better. There's more of a round-up there after dark. I really don't expect to turn much of a trick by going there. But I can't flip all the leaves in the book without going."

He ate with the family. Then he walked back to the tavern. No report from Trufant, Bowen stated. It was more evidence that Bernstein was not attempting a get-away, as Matt viewed the situation.

He lighted his pipe and loafed in the office.

After a time a man came in, well lit up with liquor. He winked, patting a hand on his stomach.

"I'm smuggling booze," he boasted to Matt. "Smuggling it from Dowling's bar. But it's being tooted where you can't seize it."

Matt smiled tolerantly.

The bibulous party was encouraged to babble more freely.

"And even your running mate, he saw me bring it across the boundary line and he didn't put up a hand to stop me. 'Cause why? He's putting in the same kind of a load, himself." He winked again.

"What running mate?" questioned Gaylord in level tones.

"Ken Gage, o' course! But he ain't spending State money, I'll say that much for him. A whippersnapper chap is buying drinks for Ken. The same feller I see selling jimcracks on the street before I went over to Dowling's place."

Matt offered no comment. He picked up an old magazine from the table at his elbow and gave no more attention to the tattler. But the officer's eyes did not focus on the printed page.

So the chap who had flinched before one State patrolman that day was later buying drinks for another patrolman, eh? Matt got out his mental slate and added to his sum.

In the late afternoon he strolled on the main street. It was in his thoughts that Elsa Gage would not be sitting alone at home to spin.

He met her promenading in new finery. With effrontery she met his stern gaze, stopped and continued her bold stare when he halted.

"Elsa, it's going to be bad all round if you keep up with this thing," he warned.

"Ditto," she taunted airily.

"I'm not much of a quitter when I believe I'm in the right. And I think it's right to yank Ken out of trouble, the best way I can."

"How come you're his guardian?" was her haughty demand.

"He's my friend."

"And he's my husband. I'm waking him up, I'm telling you. He's sick of being your understrapper, kept away from me in the woods, getting a bojack's pay for risking his life."

Here, in front of him, was the instigator of Gage's insubordination, and Matt's temper flared.

"He'll be kept farther away from you if he is rammed into Atlanta prison. If he goes it'll be on account of what you're doing."

"Look here, Matt Gaylord, you're declaring war, aren't you?"

"Elsa, I'm not going to let you wreck and ruin my friend."

"All right. You're declaring war." She sidestepped him and passed, with the warning: "Look out for yourself."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE CLINCH.

MATT sat with Marion for a short time while the mother was putting the evening meal on the table. The girl turned on her lover a roguish side glance, though her lips were nipped with mock severity.

"Gossip skips and hops fast in Quos-soc, Matt. I hear you were flirting with

Elsa Gage in plain sight on the street this afternoon."

"It may have looked like flirting to some of the old busybodies, but if they'd been close enough to hear, it wouldn't have sounded like flirting."

"However, I've been warned that there has been flirting between you and Elsa in the past."

She put up her hand and stopped his explosion.

"No, Matt, it couldn't be only lying gossip—because I got it straight from Elsa herself. She called on me this afternoon and told me." However, her smile was assurance of her complete trust in him. "You remember, Matt, how well I guessed at the game she would be playing?"

"It's fool stuff. She didn't think for a minute you'd believe it."

"Probably not. But it isn't fool stuff. She was practicing on me, that's all. Getting her hand in so as to do a good job on her husband. Matt, dear, you're in for it. Be ready."

"I won't have any peace of mind, after quitting on Ken. But I'll do it if you think it's foolishness to keep on," he offered.

"No, don't quit. His case has merely become a part of the fight. It'll get you nothing for yourself if you do quit now," she declared, more than ever sage in her counsel. "The thing has gone so far you can't stop by leaving Ken alone. They've made up their minds to use him on you, through Elsa. It's plain enough, isn't it?"

"It sure is. I've been doing thinking on it this afternoon. They're poking Ken on to make it a private fight, two men over a woman. That'll take the curse off the gang. Ken can kill me and get away with it—unwritten-law stuff and all the stuff that goes with it."

"It's what they plan to put over," said Marion, "so you can't save yourself from the mess by deserting Ken. If you can get him out of their clutches

you may be able to knock sense into him and stave off an awful scandal. It will be your scandal instead of your funeral—I know that much mighty well. You'll never let Ken Gage get you, with the warning you've had," she added with pride.

Matt thanked her with a look, making no boast of his prowess.

"There's a recess for our friendship just now. Considering how he is performing, it would sound pretty silly if I say I'm acting only from the high principles, and all that rot." He laid his palm against his breast and rolled up his eyes in affectation of virtuous altruism. "No, by the blue gods," he declared, twisting his features into savage determination, "I'll be playing their game. I'll grab the knife they're whetting and twist it away from 'em. I hope I cut a lot of fingers in doing it. Just plumb selfishness for my own sake, that's what I'm going on now. Grabbing the knife they're figuring they'll use on me." He added dryly: "Right now they're putting on the razor edge, I reckon. A drunk from Dowling's blabbed to me this afternoon that Ken is over in that hangout, allowing 'em to fill him up with booze."

"Oh!" she gasped apprehensively. "I honestly think you ought to stay away from that place to-night. It'll be better to wait and handle Ken when he's sober."

"It would be a blamed sight more sensible, I'll admit, pal. But there seems to be one special chap who is feeding the hooch to Gage. I had sort of a run-in with that chap to-day when he was playing faker on the street in the village. I'm playing a hunch, and to-night seems to be the night to play it. The chap is still at Dowling's now—or ought to be." He cocked his ear. Rain was beating against the window. Sagging clouds in the afternoon had promised that rain. "He's the dude type, Marion, and he'll probably be sticking under-

cover for the night. So I'm going to Dowling's." He rose. Mrs. Thorpe had called them to table.

The girl said nothing more to him in protest.

After supper Gaylord went to his room and pulled a slicker cape from his kit.

He buckled on his belt with two guns in holsters. Then he deliberated, his hands on the butts of the weapons. He shook his head, unbuckled the belt and hung it with the guns in a closet.

When he went downstairs Marion followed him out upon the rear porch, the roof of which protected them from the rain. They stood with arms about each other. She promptly detected the absence of his belt and weapons.

He broke in upon her anxious question.

"I put it on. Then I took it off. I'm going to Dowling's to get my mate. That's errand enough. I'll make it my excuse for being there, no matter what I'm carrying in the back of my head. If I carry my guns it won't look so much like a neighborly call on a matter of friendship," he stated, after a chuckle. "And they won't have any excuse if they use lead on a man who isn't toting guns."

"And you intend to bring back Gage?" she asked.

"Sure pop! I've got to take the whetted knife away from 'em and dull it. I don't know how Ken went to Dowling's. Probably got a lift from somebody. So I'll be taking along Betty as a lead horse. And I'll be off."

He kissed her and hurried away through the curtain of rain toward the stable.

After he had saddled the horses he started toward Dowling's by the Douglass road. The main thoroughfare had a clay surface, and he knew it would be greasy and hard footing under that downpour. Thickly fronded spruces shielded the duff of the Douglass road.

The night was black under the trees, but the chestnut, giving his head, found his way at an easy canter. And it was not necessary to search through the murky night to find Dowling's place. There was a beacon, advertising it.

The buildings were planted on a low hill that rose in an easy grade from unwooded pasture land.

Soon after Dowling had established the resort a vagabond rum-wreck sponged on the proprietor for an extended visit and exchanged favors as best he could. The stroller had been an artist of some repute before taking up the work of interior decoration of himself. By his suggestion, Dowling hired carpenters to erect on the ridgepole of the one-story saloon building a ten-foot square of boarding.

On this the artist had painted Dowling to the life—hand outstretched, publican's fat, greeting face wreathed with a grin of welcome. Reflector lanterns, housed under canopies, lighted the figure by night.

Therefore, the belated thirsty traveler had no trouble in locating Dowling's place.

A long shed, open on one side, gave shelter to the beasts and wagons of customers. Matt rode under the shed and hitched his horses to a gnawed rail.

Then he strolled into the saloon, entering by the door which admitted from Uncle Sam's land. His cap with its insignia advertised him sufficiently, but he tossed back the flaps of the slicker cape and displayed his uniform, in addition.

The room was all of fifty feet long. At the Canadian end was the bar. At the American end were chairs aplenty for guests; men were sprawled in these chairs, fogged in tobacco smoke. Roisterers in the vicinity of the bar were babbling and singing.

"Pipe the cop!" somebody bellowed.

The babble stopped; the singers were silent.

Dowling came forward toward the officer, but stopped at the painted line which crossed the room midway. His lips managed a smile but his eyes were anxious.

"Looking for anything special, Matt?"

"Nothing to bother you about, Tom." Gaylord swept his palms across his hips and tossed his empty hands in air. "You see how I've come. Not looking for trouble, at any rate."

He gazed past Dowling through the smoke haze, looking toward the bar to locate Gage. The mate was not in sight.

"Has Ken gone home, Tom? I was told he was here this afternoon."

Dowling's smile was not so easily managed now. Matt had stepped close to the line on the floor. The publican shifted his eyes from the stern stare, making an excuse to look behind him "We-e-ll"—he hesitated—"Ken has been here. He's prob'lly around the premises now somewhere."

"He's pretty tight and is upstairs in the ell, sleeping it off," volunteered the bartender.

"Yes, yes! Guess that'll be it," agreed Dowling hastily. "Getting straightened out with a little nap."

"Let me go up and find out how he's getting on." It was a request but with the click of command in it.

Dowling grinned unpleasantly "Matt, I don't want you to be breaking your own laws. The law says a State or Federal officer in uniform shan't cross the border."

"You're right. Not when he's on duty. But I'm only on a friendly errand, looking after a pal."

Dowling and his bartender swapped quick glances. Matt detected the interchange and drew certain conclusions. There could be no good and sufficient reason for keeping a mate away from one who might be needing friendly help in getting home. Matt tested on that

point to make more sure of possible reasons behind the refusal. "Tom, Ken's wife is worrying and I've come to take him home."

Somebody in the room laughed. The bartender hid a grin. Dowling twisted his face with a queer expression.

All this was the preface of trouble in the situation, so Matt realized. The thing had gone far toward open scandal, judging from the attitude at Dowling's place. Furthermore, Matt felt the suspicion that Kenny Gage might be with a companion who was keeping his identity in the dark. He tested on that point, too. "I got a tip that some chap was buying a lot of drinks for Ken. What's the big idea, Tom, and who is the fellow?"

"Nobody here has been buying his drinks, not that I know of." Dowling was unable to conceal that he was lying. A lie was uncalled for, Matt reflected, if a mere hail fellow had been consorting with an officer.

"I reckon I know more about it than you do, Tom," Matt drawled provokingly. "A souse told me what I've said—and there's some kind of a saying about booze greasing the tongue so the truth slips out. So you won't let me pass on upstairs and shake sense back into Ken, hey?"

"You're in uniform, Matt, duty or no duty—and I won't let a Yankee officer cross that line."

"Oh, of course, you've got some rights in that stand, Dowling. But the right to keep me apart from my mate in the service, you haven't got. If I can't go to him, he's got to come here to me. Even if you have to lug him down. I'm here to take him back to Quossoc, understand?"

"He's better off here, for the night, raining hard as this," insisted Dowling. Then he sneered. "You can go tell his wife as much."

The sneer—and it was stressed by snickering in the big room—snapped

the weak string which leashed Matt's patience.

"Look here, Dowling! Gage is a State officer. I'm his chief. I demand him. I'll have no more lies and cheap gab from you. If Ken Gage isn't shown to me damnation sudden, I'll call it a case of kidnaping. Half of your joint is on the soil of the United States. I can come here with a posse and make this half look mighty sick in short order. Now what?"

"I ain't inviting a lot of trouble over a plain drunk," Dowling admitted. "I was only trying to be kind to a guest, like I always am. But if his friends don't understand—" He flung up his hands, shunting responsibility, turned and went on his errand.

While the officer waited, pacing slowly to and fro along his permitted side of the painted stripe, he took his time in appraising more carefully the personnel in the big room. He knew many of the loafers. They were drinkers from Quosso, some of them; there were woodsmen whom he had met up with in various camps of choppers. He could scarcely expect these men to take any active part in aiding him. On the other hand, it was not likely that they would club with the Dowling gang against him, running the risk of putting themselves under charges brought by a State officer.

He spotted half a dozen men in the room as hostile. One of them, herded with a group on the Canadian side, was brazenly a spokesman, and asked: "What if Gage doesn't want to leave here? What then?"

"He is not so bad off, I hope, that he can't talk for himself," returned Matt. "I'll probably figure from that talk what's to be done with him."

"You can't afford to be too cocky in this place," warned the other.

"If doing a friendly job, helping a mate out of a place like this, is being cocky, then make the most of it. And

I'll do the rest of my talking to Ken Gage himself." Matt turned his back on the hostile group and walked toward the door opening on State territory, making this an opportunity to pass sociable words with the men whom he knew. None of them displayed animosity, he was glad to note.

He swung on his heel when he heard the voice of Kenny Gage. The mate had entered with Dowling and was standing with an elbow on the bar. Gage was flushed with liquor, his hair was rumpled, he was in a mood far from amiable. He bellowed:

"What's wanted, Gaylord?"

"I'm calling you back to duty," stated the chief sternly, walking toward the line.

"The hell you are! But name the duty."

"It isn't likely I'll blab it in front of a crowd. Come across here and walk outside with me."

"Nothing doing!"

Then the dapper hawker of jimecracks on the street of Quosso entered. He joined Gage at the bar and ordered drinks. He cocked an eyebrow and squinted insolently at Matt. Then he queried, in tones for all to hear, poking a thumb against Gage's ribs:

"Has papa come to yank you home?"

"Let him try to do it," invited Gage sullenly. He grabbed the glass set out by the bartender, filled it and gulped the drink.

"Mate, do you refuse to answer to a duty call?" demanded the chief.

"It isn't a duty call, and you know it."

"Then let it stand that it isn't. I certainly can't explain the call unless you walk out where we can be private. Take it that it's your best friend's call. You aren't turning that down, are you, pal?"

The fellow at Gage's elbow shot a few words in undertone from the corner of his mouth.

Incited to raging rebelliousness, Kenny took a few lunging steps toward the line.

"You can't yank me off by the collar like I'm a six-year-old kid, Gaylord. I'm going to stay here till I get ready to leave, see?"

Matt set his toes against the painted stripe and scowled into the grin which creased the features of the city slicker. The officer now realized, with disappointment, that he was undoubtedly not up against the big mogul of the narcotic smugglers. Such a personage would not be exposing himself in this fashion to identification as one of the rogues whom he commanded.

"Ken, you've been rubbing against dirt and have got a lot of it on you, talking to me like that. If you haven't gone plumb crazy, you know the truth, deep inside you. But I'm not here for any joint debate in front of these people. I'm calling you back to your job."

"I've quit the damn job."

"You can't quit till your written resignation has been accepted by the big chief at the Statehouse—till you have turned in your equipment, commission and badge."

"You dump me on a big job you have just put over. That was shoving me off the force, and it will so stand, resignation or no resignation. You sneaked out and jumped on the biggest load of dope ever handled in these parts. You ain't denying that, are you?"

"I reckon I did announce myself to the rab who was toting it," admitted the officer.

"To grab off all the glory, hey?" demanded the other fiercely.

"When I get you alone I'll tell you why I didn't take you along, Ken—if you do need to be told, which I doubt! Judging from the way you're acting now, you can tell yourself."

"That's a dirty slur."

"Come along and prove to me you don't deserve it."

But a drunken man was set in his obstinacy. His tongue was loosed by liquor. He pounded his fists together and raved.

"Making it all your own selfish job! Not even storing the stuff in the jail strong room! Oh, I get my questions answered, all easy enough. I have the right to ask the turnkey. Going to snitch a swat of it, hey, and peddle it through that pill-and-pestle brother of yours. Oh, I'm onto you now, Gaylord. You're a double-crosser all the way up the line. This isn't drunk talk. It's truth."

"It's drunk talk, Gage. I'm warning you." The officer's jaw muscles bulged in his cheeks when he set his teeth together. He was perceiving how inevitably and remorselessly this affair was approaching its climax.

"Then let it stand for what it is, as you said a little while ago. That dope may as well be peddled one way as another. By the real owners! See? I know well enough where you've hid it. I'm going to blow on where it is."

"Close that drunken yawp or take what's coming to you!" bellowed Matt, with one foot now over the line.

"Back up!" yelled Dowling. "The law won't allow you to come across that stripe in uniform."

"Yah, of course you can't come across!" declared Gage, his voice a screech of triumph. "Warning me, hey? To hell with your warning. I'm going to blow. The stuff will come out o' that house before morning, else down goes the house. So, listen, gang!"

This threatened betrayal of the Thorpe home was a challenge to Matt Gaylord; he became merciless.

He swept a chair into his clutch, raised it high and heaved it at Gage. The aim was true. The chair smashed into Gage's face and knocked him prone and senseless. Matt leaped and was on the victim even while the chair was still rolling.

The officer made a bodeful display of muscle. He threw the body of Gage across a shoulder and started for the door opening on State territory.

"He broke the law!" clamored Dowling, dancing up and down.

The herded gangsters leaped in pursuit, waiting for nobody's orders.

The loafers from Quossoc got out of the path of escape and pursuit. However, one of them did perform the service of opening the door ahead of Matt. Then Gaylord threw his soggy burden out onto the muddy ground, whirled and bombarded the rushing pursuers with chairs, mowing them down, driving them back.

Rising to his knees, one of them pulled a gun and fired at the officer. The bullet found its target in the wooden seat of an oncoming chair and ripped off a splinter.

At that juncture the dapper chap took a part in the fray. He bounded away from the bar with a gun in each hand.

Matt hurled a chair. But he paused, with another in his hands, when the fellow shouted:

"I'll bore the man who fires another shot. You damnation fools, remember your orders!"

"I thought he hadn't ought to be let to git away with it!" bleated the gunman who had fired.

The dapper chap was much excited. Too much excited to guard speech. He barked: "What he's getting away with is a bomb, you infernal idiots. Fuse burning! You don't want to step on that fuse, do you?"

Matt, pulling shut the door, heard what the dapper chap said.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A MYSTERIOUS MENTOR.

MATT stood a few moments outside, looking down on the man prostrate in the clay mire. Gage was squirming, his feet plowing furrows in the mud.

Matt conserved his strength and made no effort to raise Gage or carry him. Instead, he clutched the mate's collar and dragged him along the greasy ground as far as the shelter shed.

Two men came from the saloon, and one of them called into the gloom of the shed:

"We're Tompkins and Erskine from Quossoc, Matt. Nobody'll be chasing you, 'cording to what we've heard inside there. We thought you might be needing a little help out here."

"I can use your help, boys, and thank you. Come along in. I want to get this man lashed onto the black horse."

The two took the job on themselves. Gage came to his senses while they handled him. They slung a rope under the belly of the mare and secured the rider's feet after they had lifted him into the saddle.

Gaylord was grimly silent, inspecting the lashings before making a start toward Quossoc. Nor did Gage have anything to say.

The return was made by way of the Douglass trail under the dripping trees, Matt riding ahead, walking the chestnut and leading the docile mare.

The hour was late when they reached the village, but Matt stopped at the Thorpe house and tapped on the window of the sitting room.

There was shaded light within; he knew Marion would be up, waiting for his return. She raised the window and her anxiety melted into thankful relief. "Thank Heaven, nothing has happened to you." She stroked his shoulder, careless of the dripping slicker.

"But quite a lot *has* happened, pal." Tensely he told her. "Now I'll be taking Kenny along to his house. I reckon I'll step in there for a moment and do the best I can to put the twist bit on him. He's dangerous, as it stands."

"I'm afraid he may be more dangerous, unless you can handle him, Matt." She was peering out into the night, try-

ing to locate the man and the horses; the officer had left them outside the gate.

"And there may be danger here, though I'm hoping there won't be till I can get back. Before I floored him with a chair, Gage was nigh giving 'em a straight tip on where the dope is hid. He can guess well enough, of course. And they may be guessing, too, after what he did say. I hate to stir a hue and cry by raising a posse in the village to protect the house."

"You shall do no such thing," she returned stoutly. "I'll put out the light and stand guard at this window."

"If anybody comes sneaking, warn only once. Then shoot straight. They've got a big stake here, remember. If they do come, they'll be ugly and you mustn't be squeamish."

"Hardly," she clicked, hurrying from the window to put out the light.

Matt went on his way with the captive. In front of the Gage home the officer cut the lashings. He was obliged to ease Kenny down from the saddle. The man was still in a partial stupor by reason of liquor and the stunning blow dealt by the hurled chair.

Gage tottered on his stiffened legs. Matt hooked his arms with the other's and propelled him toward the house. No light was showing from any window. No word was spoken by either of the men. Matt rapped and waited.

When Elsa's voice was heard, making inquiry from the other side of the door Matt said brusquely:

"I've brought your husband home." He shook Gage vigorously. "Speak up man. Tell her you're with me."

The husband obeyed, mumbling the assurance. Then she unbolted the door and opened it. She had snapped on the hallway light. Confronting the pair, she pulled about her shoulders a robe figured with vivid colors.

Her pout disappeared in a grimace of disgust when she surveyed her husband.

He was smeared with mud—face and garments. His features sagged. He wore no hat, and a gash on his forehead was clearly revealed.

"You needn't have taken the trouble to bring that drunken hog home to me, Matt Gaylord!" she cried. "Why didn't you leave him to wallow where you found him?"

She turned and walked into the sitting room, snapping on a light there. Matt pushed Gage into the room. When Elsa faced her husband again, her expression was that of hatred. Whether it was real or affected, Matt could not decide.

"This is no way for a wife to treat a husband," he rebuked. "Ken has been in trouble and I made most of the trouble, I'm sorry to say."

He released his captive and Gage staggered toward a divan. But Elsa pushed him rudely away from the couch; made him stand until she fetched a wooden chair from the kitchen and set it down roughly.

"Sit on that. You shan't wreck my damask, you pig."

Gage sprawled upon the chair, making no reply.

"His wits may be a little rattled. I had to hit him with a chair to stop him from blabbing service secrets," the officer confessed. "I'm sorry, Elsa. But I don't believe he would have gone to Dowling's place except for encouragement from you."

For a moment she veiled her eyes from his accusing stare. Then she blazed:

"How dare you bring me into this mess?"

He replied as hotly:

"Lay off the bluffing. I couldn't bring you. You were already in. Don't anger me into saying any more."

She was unable to endure his gaze and he noted that with satisfaction. He realized that this was an ill time for any kind of a satisfactory understanding.

but her manner encouraged him to make the most of this opportunity.

"Elsa, you're sure running toward a hard wall just now, and you'd better turn around sharp and face away from it. If you'll do that I'll try my best to help you out of a scrape."

She did turn sharply—turned away from him and went into the hall. She faced the stairway and called:

"Aunt Bella! Come down here. I want you to see everything and be a witness."

An aunt in the house!

Matt had never heard Ken Gage speak of such a person. The chief met the subaltern's wavering gaze and detected blank lack of understanding. However, Gage continued with his silence, did not repudiate such a relative.

"Just as soon as I throw on a wrap, Elsa, dear," promised a voice.

The persons below waited in their respective places.

A serene matron descended. Her dressing gown was in subdued colors, contrasting with the vivid decoration of the younger woman. Her countenance was placid and remained so when Elsa broke out into bitter complaints and charges.

However, the wife quieted down immediately when the matron raised her hand. It was apparent to Matt that the woman's dominance over Elsa was supreme.

The two came from the hall into the sitting room, and the wife presented Matt.

"You've heard me speak of him, Aunt Bella."

The officer bowed.

Gage derricked himself up from his chair. He looked as if he expected a formal introduction also, but his wife paid no attention to him.

Matt returned the aunt's prolonged, steady gaze. Here was no ordinary woman, he was aware. He had known little about Elsa's relatives outside of

her shiftless father. It would be natural, the officer thought, to grade the rest of her kin as no great shakes in the world. But Aunt Bella was no nondescript, upcountry dame—he could see that. Even the plain dressing gown did not discount from her appearance of being something above the average. She had perfect poise and self-possession. Her manner put him at a disadvantage. There was just a shade of mockery in her tone when she put him on the witness stand, so to speak.

"So you have brought your buddy back to his wife?" She cast a derogatory side glance at the husband. "A parcel not handled with special care, it's plain. However, it's fine to have friends. Of course, all your impulse came from loyal friendship. Wonderful!"

Her even voice, her words and the way of speaking them, her suggestion of aristocratic bearing, real or assumed the hint of condescension and mockery all these elements pricked his temper.

"You'll tell me, of course, that it's another case of the David and Jonathan style of friendship."

"I don't reckon I'll be telling you anything of the sort," he returned bluntly. "I'll come down to cases, this seeming to be the time for that kind of talk."

"Ah?" The inflection put on the query, and her stressing it with an elevation of her eyebrows, stirred his righteous wrath still more. He was not going to let any woman make fun of him, after what he had been through.

"I wasn't intending to lam out the whole truth," he retorted, purposely contrasting rude plainness of words with her suave irony. "I've been meaning to keep as much dirt off Ken as I could."

The woman was perceiving his quick hostility and displayed some of her own

"But for some reason you appear to have changed your mind; then you hunted up dirt and rolled him in it."

Gage sat back on his chair, saying nothing, letting the affair take its course. He still wore the expression of one who was puzzling over a problem.

The matron egged:

"Did you also put that mark on his forehead as a friendship brand?"

"I put it on all right enough. But it ain't a friendship brand, no, ma'am. I branded him as a blabber of service secrets—branded him before he had time to blab. Now look a here! This is brass tacks. I did go to Dowling's as Ken's friend, to get him away from the gang. But that was only a part of my reason for going after him. I'll be perfectly honest and say the biggest reason was this: I sniffed their scheme to use him for a tool to hurt me with. Hurt me terribly. So I went and yanked away the tool. That's that. You'd better not ask me about how the tool would hurt me."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because I'm trying to keep this thing strictly between men—hold women out of it. Elsa, you know what I mean. Probably you and your aunt understand each other pretty well. Ask her to lay off me."

That the aunt and niece did have a good understanding was revealed when they exchanged glances.

Elsa burst out, as if spurred by suggestion.

"Aunt Bella, Matt Gaylord has heard gossip about me, and I know where he heard it. It's all because you sent me that money to settle some bills. Because this is near the border, there are fools up here who think all extra money a person shows must come from the smugglers. It's awful—but in my own case did you ever hear anything so ridiculous?"

The aunt looked the officer up and down while she laughed.

"An excellent friend for a mate to have! Believing that a patrolman's wife would take bribes from smugglers. I

gave Elsa that money, Officer Gaylord. She couldn't have what a woman ought to have. You know it because you get the same beggar's pay as her husband does. Now, Elsa, it's time for you to speak out."

The wife stepped quickly in front of Gage, who looked up at her like a lashed dog. The taunt of "beggar's pay" had stung like the snapper on a whip.

"Kenny, this is the end of all between us. Not merely because you have been brought here in this condition. But this is the time to speak out, with Matt Gaylord standing here and with Aunt Bella as a witness. Gossip can't twist the thing. I'm going away with Aunt Bella. If you want to drive me out into the rain I'll go to-night. But it will be decent of you to take yourself off to the tavern, in the condition *you* are."

For the first time since entering the house Gage spoke. Out of astounded grief, agonized puzzlement, he stammered:

"Do you mean you're quitting me—going to get a divorce?"

"I think you can get it easier than I can," she stated acridly. "Desertion is a good ground—and I'm going to give you the grounds."

"But you ain't got any right or reason to run away from me."

"I might say I've had to depend on a good aunt to have what I ought to have," she said relentlessly. "I've done my best to put the ambition into you to be something above a hound sniffing along the border."

Ken's anger began to mount; he sounded deep in his throat a canine growl, giving point to her taunt.

But his wife persisted. "And now you have even lost that job. Matt Gaylord laid you off days ago. His actions in ducking you have shown it. Now to-night, he dragged you out of Dowling's place, away from the gang, where you were ready to blab and turn on the service."

"I went over to Dowling's because I wanted——"

She drove her palm against his mouth viciously.

"You shan't do it!" she cried. "You'll try to blab against me, too, eh? For revenge. No, you shan't."

The aunt stepped forward and set herself between husband and wife.

"Gage, if you say anything it will never be believed. It's only the meanest sneak who'll try to dump the blame for his troubles onto a woman's shoulders. Show yourself a part of a man, at any rate. If you try to drag your wife into the mud with you, real men will hoot you out of this section, and you know it."

He did know it. Then men of that forest region played the game with a stiff upper lip and left the women out of it. He was cowed. He twisted around on the chair and looked away from the dominating aunt. "It's an awful jab for a fellow to get all of a sudden!" he mourned.

When Elsa had flung her decision at Kenny, like a bomb, Matt hastily retreated to the doorway between the hall and the sitting room. It was an instinctive retreat; he wanted to escape and leave family secrets to those who were concerned. But he turned and leaned against the door jamb. It occurred to him that Ken Gage was needing a friend's help more than ever. This was not merely a wife's revolt by her own volition, Matt was sure. That aunt was too palpably turning the crank of the machine.

"Right out of a clear sky—that's how it has come," Gage quavered.

Again Matt caught a glance shot from aunt to niece.

"It hasn't come out of clear sky, either," insisted the wife, blazing as if fresh tinder had been thrown on the hot coals of resolution. "You've been too blind to see what was going on, that's all."

The husband whirled and faced her. "What 'n 'ell do you mean, 'going on'?"

"You haven't even noticed how I've hardly been able to stomach you for months past, when you have come popping home. All I could see was the other girls. I could even taste them when you kissed me."

Gage leaped from the chair and kicked it into a corner.

"By the blue hell, you can't talk to me like that and get away with it!"

She pointed to the man standing in the doorway.

"If you're getting ready to use fists on anybody, use 'em on Matt Gaylord. He has told me all about how you have carried 'on in the border 'Yurrups' up North."

Matt swung erect, yanking away his shoulder from the support of the door jamb.

Gage was pacing to and fro, muttering threats and profanity. He was a dangerous man at the moment, frenzied by the turn of events, his brains still fired by liquor, conscious of the wound on his head—the blow dealt by one who had claimed to be a friend—and Gage was now all too ready to believe that the same friend had struck at the heart.

The aunt seized upon the opportunity to goad this insensate fury still more effectually.

"Elsa hates to say this. I know how she feels. She is afraid to say more. It may stir a husband to take revenge on a sneak who has wrecked his home."

"It's Matt Gaylord who has wrecked it," whimpered the wife. "But I won't say any more."

The man in the doorway clenched his fists and set his teeth, his jaw muscles bulging again in his cheeks, as they had swelled at Dowling's place.

"What the hooting blazes more is there to say?" Gage clamored.

There was long silence except for the thudding of the husband's feet as he

paced, flakes of dried mud littering the carpet.

"Out with it!" yelled Gage, after curses.

"There's always a good reason why a man slanders a husband to his wife behind his back," said the aunt. "In this case it was the same old trick. The family friend shaking the tree and holding out his hands to catch the dropping plum."

This woman had her wits with her, Matt understood. He resolved to keep a firm grip on his own wits. He had been measurably prepared for Elsa's trickery and had wondered who her mentor might be. Apparently this aunt had been the one behind the scenes. His caustic sense of humor enabled him to hold his peace in this climax, while he reflected that he had risked himself that evening in order to bring away the tool which the gang was whetting, only to lug it to the person who could give it the real razor edge of hazard.

Gage came lunging toward the accused home wrecker.

Matt flung an open palm above his head.

"Just a moment, Ken, before you tackle me. The kind of a fight you and I would have here and now wouldn't settle this thing."

"You've got to fight, you pup!"

"Probably, if you keep on believing as you do now."

"You ain't denying a damn thing!" raved the husband.

The officer was in no mood to be polite. "Right now I pass up. I know when I'm licked. I ain't in their class." He knew that he would be merely making a show of himself, trying to buck against the lies of two women. If Gage had been calm and sane and able to reason, the friend would have declared for himself against the lies. But the settlement must wait, he decided.

"If I stay here any longer I'll kill somebody!" rasped Gage. "I know it

—I feel it coming on. Gaylord, you and I are going to bump to-morrow. It hasn't come over me all at once. I've been guessing. Good friends have talked to me. A wife doesn't smash her home just for the relish of lying two men into a fight."

Gage flung himself to the wall and yanked down a holster belt which carried a gun. Then he stuffed cartridges into loops, getting the ammunition from a table drawer.

Gaylord merely glanced at this operation. But he caught the eyes of the aunt and stared at her savagely. He declared:

"Gage is plumb right in saying a wife doesn't lie for the reason he named. Can you give me any light on why she has done it?"

"She has stood for him and his ways as long as she can, sir. Now she is telling only the truth."

Matt bowed, making no comment.

Gage settled belt and holster over his hips and stamped across the room, confronting the officer.

"What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nothing now. Not in this place," replied Matt.

"All right! To-morrow, then, Gaylord, I'm going to kill you. And the law won't hang me for it."

He ran out of the house and banged the door with a force that toppled knickknacks from their shelves.

Matt followed without haste. He turned in the doorway, obeying the aunt's command. She suggested icily:

"After that warning, I suppose you'll cut in ahead and finish your wrecking job by killing *him*."

"Oh, no, ma'am. I have no relish for rope or cell. That would be too easy picking for the gang, prying me off my job by that kind of a trick."

"Then you'll let Gage shoot you, eh?"

"Not by standing up as a target. Hardly!"

"You seem very sure of yourself, Mister Officer."

"I'm sure of a lot of things, ma'am. You'll be hearing all about 'em later."

He went out into the rain and took advantage of the black night, crouching and passing to the rear of the cottage.

He had no notion of permitting a temporary lunatic to take pot shots at him. He made his way by lanes to the Thorpe house and was admitted by Marion, after a low call by which he identified himself.

She had nothing to tell him except to report that the house had been unmolested. On his part he related what had happened at the Gage home. Then he waited for her comment after he had put some sticks on the embers of the open fire, hovering close to the new blaze to dry his clothing.

"You ought to go upstairs, Matt, and get those duds off," she advised. "Wrap yourself in a blanket and I'll dry your clothes in the kitchen."

"I'm still a river driver when it comes to drying out in wet clothes," he said, smiling. "The only time I ever caught a cold was once when I shifted into dry duds. Well, pal, what do you think of what I've told you? Just a few words from you—then you trot to bed. I'm going to sit up and guard that stuff in the cellar."

"Her Aunt Bella, eh?" queried the girl, putting words to her musings.

"So she said."

"She may have a hundred aunts for all I know, of course. But this citified woman."

"Aye!" He jabbed his right thumb into the palm of the left hand. "Handling Elsa like this—holding her tight and twisting her plenty."

She pondered, her eyes on the flames.

Matt added: "And playing the game two ways to yank me off the job. If I were a dead man or convict, I couldn't bother some folks any more."

"Then she is one of 'em, you think?"

"I'm playing it on that line till I find out different."

"I don't mean to discourage you, Matt, but it seems like going up one step after another, and never coming to the top."

"It sure does seem a long ways up the stairs to get to the big gun," he admitted dolefully. "But I'll keep climbing, pal."

"And now they're thinking that Ken Gage will trip you. What are you going to do about him, Matt?"

"Wait till to-morrow, hoping he'll be sober and fairly sensible. Now scoot off to bed. I'll turn in, too, as soon as it's light. They won't try on anything by daylight, making a play for the dope."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE MANNERS OF WAGG.

**G**AYLORD snapped into wakefulness after a short sleep. His uniform was not entirely dry but he pulled it on and went downstairs.

Mrs. Thorpe consented amiably to his meddling in her kitchen and allowed him to cook his belated breakfast of bacon and eggs. A bit later Marion joined him at table.

The small brother had departed for school and should have been there at his books. But he came tearing into the house and gave scant attention to his mother's protests.

"I'm studying detective work, ma. It means more'n school stuff right now. Mister Matt, I kept my ear out last night. Listened over the banister, if you've got to know. Heard about your run-in with Ken Gage. It's touchy business, yours with him, and I can post you with some facts." The boy hurried on: "He put up at the tavern last night, and Bowen and the others are talking of how he raved about what he'd do to you to-day."

"I expected as much," agreed the officer grimly. He looked at Marion.

"He's planting his court defense ahead of time. Well, son, is he out in front of the tavern, waving his gun?"

The boy tipped his head to one side and looked wise.

"I'm giving you the facts to go on. I saw Gage tumble into a wagon that was headed for Dowling's place, so the driver said. Gage has gone after more rum. He said so; he hollered it to Bowen. Said to pass the word there'd be aplenty worth looking at when he gets back into the village."

Marion gasped her fears.

"But that news makes me worry all the less," the officer assured her. "A man with his mouth shut, and cool and collected—I'd be rather afraid of him. But Kenny will be sure to overprime himself for his job and won't be able to hit the side of the tavern barn. I'll ask Policeman Gus to toss him into the lock-up and keep him there till he straightens up. It looks to me like their double-trick knife has got wire edges and won't do much cutting—not to-day, at any rate."

"Now you march your boots to school," commanded the mother, pushing the lad toward the door.

"Not till I've made my full report on detecting," he protested, wriggling free from her clutch. "Mr. Matt, that drummer—the one you and sis went out to grab—the one I done detecting on—he's back in the village, walking on Main Street, calm as old Sancho."

This was news which put the matter of Kenny Gage in the background. Matt lost all interest in bacon and eggs.

"How in the world does he dare?" the girl blurted.

"I'm not getting him at all—not yet!" confessed the officer. "I expect tricks from that crowd, and plenty of 'em, but this bozo sure has me gummed up in guesswork."

"Do you want any more of my work on the case?" demanded the small brother importantly.

Matt tactfully handled the volunteer, at the same time easing the mother's impatience.

"You'd better keep under cover for the time being. No better place than school for holding in. Get there as fast as you can. I'll see you at noon."

The boy beamed, saluted and ran away.

For some moments Matt took deep thought, doubling his ear between thumb and forefinger.

"I don't get him, I say," he admitted, replying to the anxious quiz in Marion's eyes. "Though it may be that he's over his panic and is back here to bluff me about that seizure. I'm backed by the trunks and his possession of them, loading them on the wagon in front of witnesses. But they're only regular salesman's trunks—hundreds like 'em, made by the same concern. If that Bernstein has his own private reason for wanting to be here in Quossoc right at this time, there's probably a slick lawyer near by under the cabbage leaf. Against my say-so about the dope seizure, Bernstein can post bonds with the Federal deputy commissioner here," he proceeded, making Marion his confidant as always.

"He'll plead not guilty and put up a story of his own about the trunks, or fight the identification of 'em as his, or something along that line. That is to say, he can continue to hang around here if he has an object in doing so. No doubt he expects me to arrest him on the narcotic charge. Right-hand smash, so to say. But"—he grinned—"I reckon I'll bring in a left hook he isn't looking for. There's nothing like making the other chap switch his plans."

He put on his cap and went outdoors, followed by the girl.

The wagon which Bernstein had used was in the back yard.

"Trufant didn't come or send yesterday on account of the rain," the officer suggested to Marion. "But it's all cleared up and I hope Trufant will be

coming himself. Probably he'll be wanting to give the trail of that missing horse his personal once-over." He smiled at her. "And right now I'm taking an interest of my own in that horse case."

She did not trouble him with questions.

"Marion, you'll not have another night of worry about that stuff in the cellar. I'll tote it to where it belongs—in the jail strong room."

In the stable he put harness on the chestnut and the black and with the girl's help hitched them to the wagon. Unaided, he pulled the trunks up the rollway and loaded them onto the vehicle.

"I'll ride along the main street with 'em," he told Marion. "It'll be giving Bernstein a treat."

He drove slowly along the main thoroughfare, eyes apparently straight ahead. But he spied Bernstein readily because the latter made himself conspicuous, swinging about-face in his promenade and halting at the curb.

Lounging on the seat, Matt tossed a casual salute and kept on.

Bernstein was astonished—no question about that! He pursued, keeping abreast the hitch.

"It has cleared off nice, after the rain," remarked the officer genially. The moving wagon was close to the curb; only a few feet separated the men.

After a few rods Bernstein demanded harshly:

"Say, what's the big idea?"

"What? About my going into the trucking business?"

"You know damnation well what I mean!" He kept shifting his eyes from driver to trunks..

"If you mean anything, say it out. And you might say where you want your trunks landed."

"My trunks. They're not mine. I know nothing about them."

"If that's all the defense you're going into court with, I'll say it's mighty slim."

The horses kept walking. Bernstein marched alongside.

The officer realized and relished the peculiarity of this situation. Bernstein, so it seemed, was entirely willing to be arrested. But he dared not ask to be taken into custody. By that procedure he would be virtually confessing that he had done something for which he ought to be arrested. The officer was out to mystify the man and was doing it beautifully, to all appearances.

On the other hand, Gaylord was tussling with a very pretty problem of his own.

Bernstein provided no help, only extra perplexity, when he went on cockily:

"Slim defense, eh? You don't think for a moment, do you, that I'm bracing in here, all bold and free, unless I'm sure of how I stand? I've got plenty of story for my defense in court. You don't dare take me there."

"I'll play my own game instead of grabbing in on yours right now," returned the officer.

"Hoh! I've got you guessing," taunted the other.

"There's plenty in that line for *you* to tend to, mister. Better get busy with it."

He slapped the chestnut with the reins. The horses went on at a trot and Bernstein was left behind.

The jail was located on a street leading off the main thoroughfare. The county maintained the prison as an adjunct of the regular jail at the shire town. Quossoc was near the forest and close to the border where rough-and-tumble life provided the law with prisoners aplenty.

Matt drove into the lane leading to the rear of the building and halted his hitch at the bulkhead entrance admitting to the strong room. The turnkey, from

his window, had seen the wagon pass and obeyed the officer's gesture.

By the time Matt had leaped to the ground, the man of the keys had flung open the bulkhead doors. He gave a hand with the trunks.

When they were safely within the four stone walls, the turnkey whirled his big key ring on his finger.

"Good work! Trunks are here in the nick o' time, Matt. A feller has been asking about 'em."

"Who is asking?"

"A special agent—Federal chap He's up in the office right now."

"O. K.! I'll step up."

A stocky man was waiting in the office. He gave the patrolman offhand greeting.

"I've never happened to get so far up this way before, Gaylord. I'm Special Agent Wagg. Hope we won't be strangers from now on." He dredged in a trousers pocket and pulled out a small gold badge. He turned up the reverse side and called the officer's attention to numbers engraved in the metal. "Look in your book and prove me up."

"Excuse me for doing it, sir, but I'll be turning sizable value over to you and have got to protect myself."

He pulled his little registry book from his breast pocket and noted that the badge number was credited to Alex Wagg.

After Matt's nod, accepting the identification, Wagg said briskly:

"I'm just in from the south—special hitch. Came to the jail office first, of course, to line up prisoner and stuff seized. You have your own storage place, hey? Hope it's safe."

"It's safe," said Matt, noncommittal as to locality. "And the stuff has been guarded till I brought it here just now."

"All right, so long as it's now turned over. But storing it outside the jail was irregular."

"Maybe," admitted Matt icily. This

special agent was a little too officious, dealing with a chief of the State patrol. Matt had found several of the Federal men a bit too set up. Pricked, he handed out some criticism of his own. "It's also irregular for a special agent to come up here alone after stuff and prisoners, without a United States deputy marshal."

"Prisoners? You reported only one man nabbed."

"I reported straight—there's one prisoner. But a deputy marshal always comes."

Wagg scowled, but he controlled his speech.

"Deputy Merrill started with me, but he was called on to tackle another matter on the way. He'll join me at the railroad. So we'll sit down here at the desk and swap the usual papers, and I'll be on my way with what you turn over." He was curt, assertive, domineering. He was rushing this thing, such was Matt's resentful opinion. He hated to admit that suspicion was mixed with his resentment; this would be giving too much rein to his pricked pride. But this chap bossing so bumptiously, was getting Matt's goat, and the officer honestly acknowledged that feeling.

"Come, come! Get busy, Gaylord." The agent thumped himself into a chair at the turnkey's desk and twisted the cap off a fountain pen.

Matt spread his broad palm on the desk and leaned over the stranger.

"I know well all the deputy marshals mister. If one of 'em was with you making it all regular—making me sure you're Agent Wagg and—"

The stocky man leaped to his feet and cursed vociferously. He shook his hairy fist under Matt's nose.

Then the agent brought papers out of various pockets. There were letters addressed to Alex Wagg. There were warrants unserved. There were other evidences of identity. He pawed over the papers after he had strewed them or

the desk. He yanked one sheet away from the litter and shoved it before Matt's eyes.

"There's your telegram to headquarters, dammit! You know your own wording, I reckon."

Matt undoubtedly would have submitted to proof such as this. But the violent agent, a moment later, figuratively slapped an officer's face—and the affair was made less official than it was bitterly personal.

"Damn you, Gaylord, you're bucking against an Uncle Sammer, you cheap State cop!"

The patrolman stiffened. Involuntarily he raised his hand. Into the hand Wagg thrust the fountain pen.

"Get busy, I tell you. I've got a train to catch."

Matt said nothing for a few moments, distrusting his powers of self-restraint. During that pause he did some thinking. He had no real reason for doubting the identity of Wagg as a special agent. He had no authority for holding him in Quossoc. The regulations, to be sure, provided that prisoners and valuable contraband should be turned over only to a deputy marshal accompanied by a Federal aid. But a State officer was allowed an option in that matter. Matt knew of no good excuse why he should not exercise the option now and do what the special agent commanded.

But again Wagg was storming insolently.

Matt frankly gave himself over to stubborn wrath. He glanced at the pen, threw it on the desk. He was thinking of Bernstein as a possible snubbing rope in this exigency.

First, he gave his ire a bit of a gallop.

"That'll be enough of that talk, Wagg. Any more of it will put this thing on a scrapping basis and we'll have to talk business after the fight is over. You get me, don't you?" He

put his rageful visage close to Wagg's retreating face.

"Mister Turnkey," clamored the special agent, "you'll take note of how a State officer is blocking a Federal man."

"You'll also take note, Mister Turnkey, of how a State officer is insisting on the Federal man staying in Quossoc till he has wound up all the business he came here to do," said Matt.

"What in hell do you mean by that?" demanded Wagg, looking a bit bewildered.

"I mean I'm helping instead of blocking. I reckon you'll be taking along another prisoner besides the one locked up here."

Now Wagg was more wholly at a loss.

Matt detected the discomfiture and figured it as a queer display for an officer to make after he had been promised extra prey.

The patrolman was stalling for time, protecting himself as much as possible from an allegation which might be made later to the effect that he had interfered with a Federal man.

"You'll have to wait here, Mister Agent." Matt started for the door.

"This is spite work with bluff behind it," was Wagg's accusation.

Gaylord turned at the door. He used his gimlet stare.

"I hope there isn't anything else but spite and bluff behind it, Special Agent Wagg. It'll be too bad if there is something else."

Leaving that for a cud to while away the waiting, Matt hurried out.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### A HORSE THIEF NABBED.

**G**AYLORD mounted the wagon and trotted the horses past the windows of the jail office, knowing that Wagg would watch the departure. This hurry should suggest that the State officer was giving strict attention to duty.

But before he reached the main street Matt pulled the team to a halt. He had spied Stableman Trufant of Waller Junction straddling along, evidently making for the jail.

The owner of the wagon came alongside and eyed his property with satisfaction.

"I've been expecting you, Trufant," stated Matt. "In fact, I was on my way to the tavern stable, hoping to find you there."

"I went straight there first, of course. Then a somebody told me you was seen taking my wagon to the jail. Thought you might have changed your mind about letting me have it."

"It's yours. You can have it mighty soon. Hop aboard and make sure."

Promptly Trufant climbed to the seat beside Matt. The latter inquired:

"Have you got your other horse back?"

"No sign o' the critter as yet. Or of the other critter who stole the nag."

"You'd like to see that rab, wouldn't you?"

"Sa-a-ay! He'd be an answer to prayer, all right."

The officer was thinking more rapidly. His plans were now clicking into shape. Evidently there was a hidden reason why Bernstein was entirely willing to be arrested by a State officer. Not seeking arrest, perhaps, but willing to run the risk of it in order to be in Quossoc that day for some purpose of his own.

All right. Let Bernstein play his game. Matt, after meeting Trufant, had an ace to play for himself. He would be able to trump Bernstein's trick in a way which would confuse the opponent.

With Matt time was a vital element in the affair as it stood then. He was maneuvering to hold Wagg and the dopé in town until doubts could be cleared up.

Walking the horses down the main

street, chatting casually with Trufant, the officer beheld Bernstein some distance away. Now he had a companion who was promenading with him.

Coming closer, Matt perceived that this companion was the jimmiechap, the "slicker" who later pulled his guns and dominated the thugs at Dowling's.

However, the fellow had a right to feel safe in Quossoc in daylight, Matt confessed; no charge had been laid against him. Furthermore, the patrolman could not make an arrest in the village limits.

"Trufant, call to that cop on the sidewalk." It was a sharp command. "Ask him to hop aboard here."

Trufant called. Then he asked anxiously, while the policeman was sauntering toward the wagon:

"What'll I tell him I'm wanting him for?"

"Look down the street for yourself and you won't need any prompting from me!"

Shading his eyes with palm at forehead, Trufant peered. He yelped:

"Cockeyed hossfly! I'll say I don't need prompting!"

The police officer obeyed the frantic flourishing of Trufant's arm and leaped onto the wagon, standing behind the seat.

"Spot that paunchy gazebo down there, cap. When we haul to the curb jump on him, nab him!"

"What's he done?"

"He stole a hoss from me. I'm Trufant of the Waller Junction stables. He hired a hitch to come here and then stole one o' the hosses. The mate is at Bowen's stable."

"As you say!" returned the policeman affably. "O. K. with me! You're ready to go before the judge and back up the complaint, of course?"

"Ready to go?" mocked the raging horse owner. "I'll cover ground to the jedge in one jump!"

Abreast the nonobservant Bernstein

and his companion, the policeman leaped over the wheel and laid hands on the accused.

"You're under arrest, mister," was the reply to furious queries.

Trufant stood on the wagon seat and squealed:

"You—you, asking whaffor, you blast-fired crook! You're a low-down hoss thief, that's what! Lug him off, cop! I'll chase."

"Pulling *me* for horse stealing?" The prisoner bit through the cigar he was smoking. "Look a here, whatever your name is." He shook his fist at Trufant. "How dare you call me a horse thief? I've been using that horse."

"Yah-h-h! That's what you stole him for—to use him!" was the owner's shrill taunt.

"If you're bound to make this kind of a fuss about it, I'll buy the devilish old knacker here and now—cash down." Bernstein pulled a fat roll of bills out of his trousers pocket.

But Trufant, in refusal, beat the air with his palms.

"Not by a damn sight! Trying to squeak out because I've ketched ye? No, sir! Too many let-hosses are being stole in this region and sold over the boundary line. I'm going to make an example of ye, for the sake of perfecting stablemen. Drag him along, officer!"

He scrambled down from the seat, but Matt laid hold of him and held him in the wagon.

"I'll lend you the horses for a few minutes, Trufant, and you own the wagon. Better give all parties a lift to the jail. I can't go with you. I've got some business to tend to and I'll turn the hitch over to you."

"That's a good plan, and much obliged," said the policeman, nodding friendly approbation at Matt, who laid the reins in Trufant's hands and stepped down.

"Gaylord, you're behind this insult to

me," blustered the prisoner, choking with rage.

"What d'ye mean—insult?" queried Matt serenely.

"Poking this old swipe up to have me pulled as a horse thief. It's an insult! Me a horse thief!" He snarled, speaking the last word.

"Well, I have never heard of 'em hanging a man for smuggling, but they've swung up a good many horse thieves in this country. So you're named in a hanging offense—and that's being a high criminal, ain't it?" He grinned at Bernstein.

The jimcrack salesman had his say at that juncture:

"It's plain enough you've got a finger in this fool complaint, Officer Gaylord. You're making it hard for my friend. I was man enough last night to save your life. Now be man enough yourself to call the stableman off."

"I'd like to see anybody call me off!" railed Trufant.

Matt shrugged his shoulders and his grin broadened.

"And that's how she shapes, Mister Jimcracker! I can't handle Mr. Trufant like you handle your cheap rabs." He turned to the police officer. "By the way, Pete, I'd like to have you use 'Colonel' Bernstein about right." He smuggled a wink to the cop. "Let him sit in the turnkey's office. I'll be going back there pretty soon. You'll find a special Federal agent there. Tell him you're holding the colonel, here, on a horse-stealing case and it'll have to be cleared up before any other charges are placed. Advise the special agent to keep his sitting and be all patient."

Matt swung away down the street, getting a bit more enlightenment from the curses which Bernstein heaved after him. The latter, it was now evident, was frantically restive under delay. His arrest for horse stealing instead of on a more serious charge had thrown some sort of a wrench into the gears, that was

plain enough. There was more fuel beneath Bernstein's fury than merely the alleged insult involved in the situation.

Gaylord, going on his way, was hoping that sparks would be struck when Bernstein and the special agent bumped. The turnkey had good eyes and sharp ears, and Matt knew that the officer's tongue would be ready to give tips to a State patrolman.

While he walked along the street, Matt devoted thought to the telegram which he intended to dispatch to Federal headquarters. To avoid any comeback he decided to confine his inquiries strictly to his own concerns.

Therefore, when he reached the Quossoe telegraph office, he wrote this wire, addressing it to the United States marshal:

Agent Wagg here alone. Reports Deputy Merrill tending to another job. Wagg demands delivery of prisoner and narcotics. Am asking authority for said delivery.

MATTHEW GAYLORD, State Patrol.

There was no through wire from Quossoe. It would be necessary to relay the message from a central office down the line.

Killing time while waiting for a reply, Matt went out on the street. He was conscious of queer glances from those whom he met. He knew well enough what was behind the covert scrutiny. Kenny Gage had advertised well his ferocious intentions.

Matt strolled into the tavern. Landlord Bowen called him into the private office and was outspoken.

"Look here, Matt, Gage will soon be blowing back here and he'll be drunker'n a bear after a dose of rum-and-molasses bait. What's your plan of tackling him?"

"I haven't planned, Dan. It'll have to take care of itself."

"Of course, I know well enough that Gage hasn't any right or reason behind him. But most of the cussed old gossips

won't lay off believing the worst of any man. If he gets you they'll back him up later in court."

"I reckon that'll be the way of it," admitted the other quietly.

"And if you get the drop and shoot Gage, they'll jug you because it wasn't in the line o' duty," expostulated Bowen. "Private quarrel, and all that."

The officer nodded acquiescence.

"I hear a lot of talk in this tavern, Matt. Men are in and out, and they gabble. It's in the air about the main squeeze himself being in these parts right now. He's here for the clinch. All in the air, as I've said, and you know how fast word flies in this neck o' woods. And the hoorah yell, as I hear it, is this: 'Go get Matt Gaylord!' A lot of their 'snow stuff' is prob'ly piled up and you're blocking the sluice. Duty is duty, and all such! I know it. But I'll be damnified if you're called on to bear the whole brunt alone, as the thing seems to be shaping up. Why don't you duck out o' sight for a little spell and have your boss send a special crowd up here?"

The officer shook his head.

"I don't want to seem like a reckless fool in this thing, Dan. Don't play me as being that. But if the big kibosh is really up here with hand on the throttle, whatever is now planned will be called off if a big posse heaves in sight. Why, you know as well as I do that spies will flash the word that the specials are on the way. A pitched battle is the last thing the gang is looking for. I think you're right about how the thing is shaping now. And they're after me special because I'm keeping on acting like a fool, as they figure it. I may never have another chance like this."

He became more earnest.

"Confidentially, Dan, I'm going to leave the service. But not right now, under fire, not by a damn sight! If I can do now what I'm aiming to do, I

won't go back into the old rut of pancake stuff, chasing scattered hellions of runners-in and gunmen. I'm sticking along for a grand slam. What do you say to that?" he asked wistfully.

Bowen relighted his cigar and cursed. But he beamed on Matt and blurted:

"I guess if it wasn't for the 'damn fools,' as the world calls 'em when they are tackling the job, nothing specially big would get done."

Matt stood up and put out his hand to take the fist which Bowen proffered.

"I'm sure much obliged to you for classing me in with them who do things. This thing is rolling along just now with the other feller doing most of the pushing. Let 'er, roll, Dan, let 'er roll!"

Matt left the tavern and paced slowly on his return to the telegraph office. He met more of those veiled looks and suggestive grimaces.

There had been plenty of time for Kenny Gage to prime himself at Dowling's and return for the promised conflict. Matt loosened his weapons in the holsters. For the comfort of his soul he reflected that his marksmanship would undoubtedly serve in disabling the drunken antagonist. But killing an errant friend was not in Matt's thoughts.

Gage was nowhere in sight.

Matt went into the telegraph office and waited patiently after he was informed that his wire had not been answered.

Eventually the reply message was laid before him. He scanned it and grunted.

The wire read:

MATTHEW GAYLORD, State Patrol, Oquossoc.

Office out of touch with Marshal Danforth temporarily. But we see no reason why prisoner and seized goods should not be turned over to Agent Wagg in emergency which seems to exist.

C. P. EMMONS, Chief Clerk.

Undoubtedly an emergency did exist, was Matt's thought, considering the state of mind Agent Wagg was in.

There seemed to be no further excuse for delay. But Matt took his time on his return toward the jail, sauntering along the main street.

Trufant overtook him and pulled to the curb. The stableman now had his own hitch. He had paired with the horse held for him at Bowen's stable a nag he had ridden horseback from Waller.

"I'm on my way home, officer, and I thank you for all favors. I've left your high-steppers at the tavern stable."

"You landed your load at the jail O. K., of course."

"You bet! And I was held up there quite a spell. That city slicker beat it out and called in a justice of the peace, and Bernstein managed to post cash bonds. I fit hard against it, but he promised to have the hoss sent back to me and handed me fifty dollars for the use of it up to date." He added regretfully: "I'm afeard I can't jam him very hard for hoss stealing if he comes back for a trial."

The officer had put some stock in Trufant's violent declarations against any compromise. Matt wanted to hold Bernstein in Quossoc. The man had manifestly come into the village for some specific purpose. He might be of more importance in the gang than the patrolman had estimated at first, so ran Matt's second thoughts. Unlikely to be the high mogul, but hitched up closely enough to be used in following a plainer trail to headquarters.

Trufant, more insistent, could have put extra blocks in the way. However, Matt was inclined to be philosophic. Bernstein had served his purpose to some extent; the officer had, at least, stalled the departure of Wagg until words had been passed with headquarters, though the return message had only fixed more firmly the identity of Wagg, acknowledging him as an accredited emissary on the case.

Matt knew that it now became his

obligation to place Bernstein under charges on the narcotic case. A Federal officer was taking the matter over and into his keeping must be given the second prisoner, though the departure of Bernstein might remove a valuable link in the case which the State officer had tackled.

Matt walked into the jail office and surveyed the persons there.

Banton had been released from his cell and was in the company of Wagg and Bernstein. The three of them glowered at the new arrival.

Matt stuck the telegram into the special agent's hands and the latter read it. He jumped to his feet and swished the sheet under Matt's nose.

"Wiring to headquarters to check up on me, hey? Of all the damnation nerve!"

"It's prudence, but if you want to call it nerve, suit yourself."

"And now you'll sign release, hey, having no more excuses left?"

"Yes, Mister Agent, even to tossing in an extra prisoner. That man!" He pointed to Bernstein.

"I'm not bothering myself about a horse thief!" However, Wagg did not stand up well enough to suit Matt when the latter drove an extra hard stare at the agent.

"Oh, yes. He did steal Trufant's horse," stated the patrolman, paying no heed to Bernstein's profanity. "But he was also toting the dope I seized. I arrested him but he got away from me. And here he is again. So it's all right."

"I don't know about it's being all right, Gaylord. What kind of monkey business is all this, anyway?"

"You have your prisoners and the contraband. I'm saving answers for the United States district attorney in court." He sat down at the turnkey's desk, pulled blanks from his breast pocket and went about making out the necessary papers.

"Sorry I've made you miss your

train, Agent Wagg," Matt said over his shoulder. "Reckon you'll be staying in town for the night."

"You're off your reckoning. I'm starting as soon as I have those releases."

"Then you'll be riding part of the way after dark. With a couple of prisoners instead of one, as you planned on. Suppose I saddle a horse and ride along with you as far as the railroad?" he offered, with a particularly private reason for the generosity.

Wagg kicked his foot against a big valise on the floor. "A half dozen sets of leg irons and handcuffs in there! A Federal man isn't caught napping. I don't need your help, Mister State Officer."

The refusal was too brusque, as Matt viewed it. He was confessing to himself that he had no right to entertain this persistent suspicion of Wagg. Probably, he owned up, it was due to animosity roused by the special agent's nasty style in that earlier meeting.

Nevertheless, after his usual fashion, Matt was inclined to keep on poking when he discovered a tender spot. He turned and faced Wagg.

"Are you meaning to tell me you won't allow me to go along with you as a guard?"

"Why should I take you? These men will be ironed. I know how to handle my prisoners. And this thing is in Federal hands from now on," he added pompously. "State officers are out of it."

On the surface his reasons sounded plausible. But the snappish refusal to accept assistance was not so good. Matt set his teeth and grunted.

After he had signed the papers he passed them to Wagg.

"Here you are. Best wishes for a nice trip down to the railroad."

"It won't be anything else," averred Wagg. "Don't worry."

"I'll try hard not to," returned Matt

sweetly. "But that's the only fault I have in my nature—I worry too much."

Wagg yanked open the valise and produced fetters. He was manacling the prisoners when Matt walked out.

The turnkey followed, slamming the door to set the snap lock.

"Matt," he said in low tones, "I don't claim as how there's anything fishy in this case, and I wouldn't be saying a word to you, anyway, unless I had seen plain enough how that special agent rasped your feelings. Banton and Bernstein didn't talk to Wagg, because I was in hearing all the time. But judging from their looks they sure acted as if they wanted to."

"They'll have plenty of chance from now on. But the case is in Federal hands now and it's none of my business."

"I get you," returned the jail officer. He winked and grinned, unlocked the office door and went in.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### FACE TO FACE.

**A**GAIN sauntering along the main street, Matt became aware that the officious jimcrack salesman was following him. At the jail the officer had wondered where that manifest ally of Bernstein and Banton had taken himself.

Gaylord walked more slowly; he affected interest in window displays of the stores, allowed the man to come close. Then the officer spun around and faced the trailer.

"What are you chasing me for?"

The sharp demand did not jump the fellow. His poise revealed that he had been expecting some such query. He looked up and down the street, swinging his arm to indicate groups of men here and there.

"Oh, I'm merely keeping close to the side lines so I won't miss anything."

"Another horse-thief arrest, maybe?" dryly suggested the officer. "You're

keeping bad company. With gunmen last night, to-day chumming with a horse stealer and running errands to get him out of jail. By the way, I'm wondering why he continued to hang around that jail till I got back there and pulled him in all over again on a smuggling charge."

"Did he take chances like that?" asked the other, affecting surprise so extravagantly that it became mockery. "Well, I'm all done trying to help him out of scrapes. And anyway, I can't afford to miss the show out here. It's being well advertised." And his swinging arm indicated the waiting groups. "You're here according to the billing, but why doesn't Gage show up?"

The patrolman was satiric on his own part.

"Maybe because he can't get up a head of steam without you as his special fireman on the job. He had a corking good pressure last night."

"It ought to be lasting over till to-day," returned the chap, brazenly insolent. "He's in good hands."

"Probably! You seemed to have good helpers at Dowling's last night. And this'll be about enough between us, mister. Move on."

"It'll take a village cop to make me move. Your uniform doesn't mean anything except on the wild lands."

Matt turned his back on the taunter.

Walking along the street, Gaylord met Marion Thorpe. Her manner, as well as her first words, informed him that she had been searching for him.

"Matt, Elsa and that aunt, or whoever she is, have left the village. One of the neighbors came and told me. A man on horseback rode up to the house, leading two saddled horses. Then Elsa and the aunt came out, got on the horses and went away with him. In Dry-goods Sarah's I found a drummer who has just come up the turnpike. He says he didn't meet the riders. So it looks like they may have gone into the woods. Is

this news worth anything to you? I hoped it might be."

"You're a blessed little helper, anyway," he assured her, "even if the news only proves that she has done what she threatened Ken she would do. And the news is worth something. When her husband finds out that Elsa has really gone, he'll be more dead set on what he aims to do to me. That's the play of the gang, of course, and Elsa is letting 'em tell her what's what."

"You're walking here on the street as if you're waiting for him," she protested.

"Well, there isn't much more to do just now after what I've finished with." Succinctly, he informed her of Wagg's coming and going, mentioning the events between.

She was always sensitive to tone and manner in Gaylord. She surveyed him anxiously.

"Do you think the agent is crooked?" she demanded bluntly.

"I hate to think so and I won't say so. But I didn't like his style, that's sure. He stirred my dander. Perhaps that's the trouble with me now. And his meanest dig was shunting me off from going with him as a guard. If he's crooked he didn't want a watcher. If he's straight he insulted me after my polite offer. And that's the best I can say for Special Agent Wagg!"

"He's well on his way by now, I suppose."

He glanced at his wrist watch.

"He's been gone at least half an hour. I'm putting him out of my mind."

However, less than a minute after that resigned remark, Agent Wagg was very much in Patrolman Gaylord's mind, even to the exclusion of everything else.

The manager of the telegraph office ran up to the pair who were chatting on the street. He jammed a message into Matt's hand. "It's a rush wire, Matt, and I've brought it myself to

make sure." He started back to his office.

The officer held the sheet outspread, inviting Marion's inspection. The message was:

MATTHEW GAYLORD, State Patrol, Quossooc.

Have just seen your wire. Advice from chief clerk is countermanded. Party named by you has come under suspicion. Deliver nothing to him or to anybody. Am starting north at once.

PHILIP DANFORTH,  
United States Marshal.

"Here's one hell of a note!" barked the officer, jarred into speech which was improper in the presence of a young lady.

But she manifested only intense interest in the situation.

"If you wire back to him, what will you say, Matt?"

"I'm not going to wire anything back. It's too late for wiring. He's probably on the way. Anyhow, I'm not letting onto him that I've stubbed my toe in this thing."

"But it was not your fault," the girl insisted warmly.

"In one way it wasn't. On the other hand, I turned down my hunch. That makes me feel guilty in my own mind. Marion, I'm going to do my best to grab those crooks, Wagg and all! Have 'em back into my clutches before the marshal gets here. Excuse me now. I'm hustling to the job."

He turned from her and started on the trot along the street.

One of a group of men hailed the officer sharply.

"Hi, there, Gaylord! You ain't that kind, are you, ducking out from under? Look behind you."

Matt obeyed the command; it was full of significance. He halted, turned and looked along the street. Far up the main thoroughfare, entering from the direction of the Gage home, the husband of Elsa came swinging along.

Encounter with this distracted man had been inevitable. Matt realized it.

He had been expecting Gage for hours. The antagonist was overdue. But his arrival at this critical juncture, when every moment counted with the officer, made the coming particularly hateful.

The affair itself might be merely a matter of minutes. But the aftermath might effectually put the officer out of the running on the big affair which had so suddenly developed. Shooting down Gage would entail a delay while Matt dealt with the law and satisfied a magistrate. It would be an affray on the public street even if the officer's marksmanship saved him from the charge of manslaughter.

And if Matt should be the stricken victim, he must be counted out of a duty job on which all his blazing hopes were centered at that moment.

He could not afford to waste time and risk everything by shooting it out with Kenny Gage. Therefore, once more he turned—turned his back on a declared foe.

From groups here and there rose a chorus of derisive "Ya-a-ahs!" when he ran down the street. Men stepped into his path with arms outspread. He bumped them out of the way.

Matt had made keen survey of the advancing antagonist. Gage was again in uniform. And he was no staggering sot. His gait had a snap in it. He was dangerous. Matt was realizing that the affray would be no mere bowling down of a toppling pin on the alley of the street. Gage had a way of his own with a gun when his wits were clear. With flash of mental vision Matt saw himself on a surgeon's operating table—yes, in an undertaking parlor. Then what about the duty job? That duty was the preëminent thing in this exigency.

He continued to run.

He heard Gage shouting; the man became more and more vociferous. Matt glanced over his shoulder and saw that Gage had taken up the chase on the run.

"Where will you get off in these parts, after this?" bawled a bystander. "Gaylord, you've shown yourself a coward and a quitter."

Against any allegation of that nature Matt had made his brave stand during all the years of his spotless service. He was paying no heed to flailing arms ahead of him, he had been bumping obtrusors out of his path on the street. But when men generally, in front and behind, took up the cry of "Coward!" he was halted more effectively than by mere physical barriers.

His reputation was at stake. As a man he might disregard reputation for the moment, making personal pride a silly element in this emergency.

But his prestige as an officer was hazarded, would be doomed if he scuttled away from this widely advertised affair of honor. It had truly settled into such an affair, as the captious gossips viewed it. He knew how all the tongues had dealt with the matter. If he fled now from Gage Matt understood that he would be settling infamy on his character, would be giving full weight to Gage's charges, would be heralded in all the north country as a renegade who had wrecked a home and was too much of a coward to face the situation manfully.

Matt Gaylord done for as man and officer. The shame of it pursuing him even if he presumed to stand at the altar with Marion Thorpe. He could not face the prospect.

Duty was duty, according to the code of the patrol service. But all consideration of this was swept out of his mind now by more inexorable circumstances. He loved a girl, loyally and honorably. That love must be the mainspring of action. He must save her from the ignominy which threatened both of them now.

Once again he turned, halting in his tracks.

He saw the girl. She was bravely

holding to her place, standing at the curb, looking first toward Gage, then at Gaylord.

He saw something else which was significant. Quosso's one police officer, swinging his club, sauntered off the main street and disappeared between buildings with the air of a peace guardian who saw nothing to worry about. Plainly, the cop was submitting to public opinion as it then was rampant. In that border village conventionalities were often so disregarded when occasions were critical.

Matt walked toward Gage, who kept on in his advance.

Men between them ducked here and there into doorways. One of these dodgers squealed:

"Ye had to do it, didn't ye? We made ye do it, hey?"

Matt had imposed silence on himself. But this taunt must be met. He proclaimed:

"Have it understood that I'm not trying to suit the barking pups in this village. Damn you, you all know I'm not a coward, and I'll tend later to men who have called me one!"

He kept on, walking toward Gage, who continued to advance. Neither made a move toward his guns. Then Gaylord halted and challenged sternly. "Hold up for a minute, Gage." When the other obeyed, the challenger said loudly, for all to hear: "You've never seen me afraid to meet anybody. But can't this thing be held up till later?"

Gage shook his head vigorously.

"It's got to be tended to right now."

"Understand that I wasn't running away from you, Gage. I was going on duty. Something has come up, all of a sudden."

Harsh laughter was cackled in chorus down the street. Matt swung about, deliberately turning his back on Gage.

"That's enough on that line, you hyenas! You'll all hear aplenty later about what my duty call is—after the

job has been done." Again he faced Gage. "This is no bluff, man. I'll shoot with you on the public street, but I won't gab here about service matters. You'll have to pull first. Go ahead! Be quick about it. Every minute counts with me right now."

"I can't gab here, either," returned Gage. "I've come hunting you up, but you ain't getting me."

Matt retorted grimly:

"I'll be getting you with lead in about ten seconds if you try to waste any more of my time. Pull, I tell you!"

"All right. But watch me sharp when I pull. You'll be getting me then. I won't have to blab out to please these old scoop ears."

He lifted his gun slowly from the holster. He did not elevate it in aim. He raised it parallel with his body, right hand clutching the butt. When it was opposite his face he set his left hand on the barrel and broke the weapon down. The cartridges snapped out of the chamber and scattered, rattling on the hard street. Gage replaced the empty weapon in the holster. "Now do you get me, Matt?"

"I reckon I do. The big part, anyway. But whatever's underneath, I don't get it."

"You'll get it all as soon as we can be private. And it's a wonder you didn't catch on when you saw me back in uniform."

"I was projicking on what it meant," admitted the chief; "but you've been keeping me guessing, Ken—you know it."

"Come along with me. I'll fix it so you won't guess any longer."

Matt swung into step with his mate.

"Straddle it off, Ken. Time counts, I tell you again. Dan Bowen will let us have his private office."

The two marched briskly in the middle of the street. Men in groups came tumbling out of doorway recesses and from behind the corners of buildings.

"They sure did top off the rest of the insults by scurrying under cover," Matt remarked. "Didn't seem to think we were much good on the aim, I'll say."

"Don't think I was making a queer play by coming to you on the main street," pleaded Gage. "But letting 'em see for themselves is the only safe way to handle the liars in this place."

"There's another way, too, but I hope I won't be called on to use it, considering how much I'm caught up on time just now," growled Matt, snapping glances to right and left.

There was plenty of suppressed jeering. It came from massed groups. No individual was offering himself as a spokesman or making himself a special object for attention by the offended parties.

Matt's anger was growing but he was barred from reprisal; the groups remained en masse, merely huddled curs, snapping at his heels.

However, he came upon one man who was by himself and was blatant. He was a burly teamster. He came to the curb along with others who had sought refuge in a doorway. He mounted to the high seat of his truck wagon and was bawling what he thought of cowards.

When the mates stopped near the wagon, the man turned on them, having confidence in his elevation on the seat; also he held a whip with a heavy stock. He cursed the pair, giving names to their performance.

"I take it, the show didn't have enough pep for your taste," suggested Matt, with disarming mildness.

"You showed yourself a coward first, and then the other quitter copied you," derided the teamster. "Show, hey? It showed what I've said."

"It'll be a shame to disappoint the crowds," stated Matt, looking up and down the street. "There's turn-out enough for a circus. Your size, John-

son, recommends you. Come down off that seat. The gawkers will have their show, all right."

"The hell I will! I'm only saying what they're all saying."

"Oh, I know what they're saying. I've been hearing it from packs. I'm going to hand out a hint in this village that they'd better stop their saying. I'll use you to point up the hint." He stepped close to the wagon. "Come down, I tell you!"

Johnson doubled the lash to the stock and brandished a formidable weapon.

"I ain't a-going to lower my self-respect," he snarled.

Gaylord jumped nimbly to the pole between the horses. From that vantage point he leaped to the footboard of the wagon, catching the descending stock across his palm and yanking so quickly that the teamster, bending forward and holding desperately to his means of defense, came down along with his weapon before his slow mind operated on his clutch.

Matt drove out his elbow and shunted the attacker to the ground.

Johnson fell on his hands and knees and the whip flew out of his hold and slid along the ground, out of reach. He scrambled to retrieve, but Matt grabbed his collar, pulled him erect and deliberately slapped the mouth from which spouted oaths.

"Put up your hands, Johnson! Else I'll make you too much of a holy show!"

The teamster had brawn. Men were running to view the affair. Their thudding feet were like drumbeats calling for battle.

Johnson yelled and struck.

Matt slanted the blow with a tense forearm, and countered. His fist took effect under the man's ear. Johnson staggered to one side and came against the officer's other fist which cracked solidly against the temple.

Johnson's bulk had no gears for speed. The first two blows dizzied him

and made him more clumsy. Furthermore, he had no real motive to animate him.

Inside of sixty seconds the avenger of reputation beat the opponent to his knees, set foot against the swaying breast and drove Johnson floundering on his back, half stunned and helpless.

Onlookers were massed about the scene.

Matt gave no more attention to the wriggling example. He walked along the forefront of the crowd, fists clenched.

"If I hear of another man in this village making talk, I'll hunt him up and use his teeth to nail down his tongue with. Whatever is between Ken Gage and myself is clean. But I'm not going to turn it inside out for the snoopers of Quosoc to peek and squint at. Do you understand?"

They shifted their gaze from the flaming torches in his eyes. They did not reply to him. They did not even murmur among themselves.

He turned from them to Gage and the two went on.

## CHAPTER XV.

BACKED BY FRIEND AND FIANCEE.

ONCE more you've taken the whole job on yourself, Matt," chided Kenny.

"When there's time, mate, I'll explain to you why I have handled other jobs alone, of late."

"You don't have to tell me. I know all about it, Matt." It was said with contrition. "I'm not blaming you any more. All that there's any need to say I'll say to you, friend."

"Wait till we get inside Bowen's place. And hurry! Don't say a whole lot when we're there. If you have come to your senses—and I'm thinking you have—that's enough for me."

Bowen opened his mouth and eyes when the pair entered the tavern. His appearance suggested that his first

thought was that enemies had sought an arena in the big room in order to fight their battle.

Matt grinned. "We're borrowing your private office for a minute, Dan. But we won't be mussing it up with blood or anything."

Gage closed the office door after he had followed Matt in.

The two stood, confronting each other. Kenny wasted no time, but spoke at once:

"You can see I didn't get drunk when I went to Dowling's to-day. But I did get a lot else, Matt. They thought they had me all solid for 'em. They had seen you lay me out in front of 'em. They're like all renegades. Couldn't see any deeper. Revenge comes first with 'em. And I had talked dirt when I was drunk."

Matt nodded understandingly.

"So that's why they thought they had me nailed with 'em. They talked out whole hog to me. It has been a case of 'Go get Matt' with that gang. Right now they're in a hell of a hurry. So they put the gad to me. Wanted the job done quick. Said the law would never lay a finger on me. Unwritten law would dance all over the other kind. All that guff, you know."

"Yes, I know, Ken." The chief glanced at his wrist watch. "Spit it out fast."

"A big job ahead, is it, Matt?" Gage asked anxiously.

"A damnation big one! What else you got to say?"

"While they talked I snapped into a realizing sense of what a fool I had made of myself regarding you. A sense that kept me from taking another drink. They pushed it at me, you can bet. But I was sobering up mighty fast. And I broke away and hustled for home. What I found there—and what I didn't find—well, mate, you can see for yourself that the booze is all blown out of me."

Matt met the steady gray eyes and surveyed the stalwart erectness.

"You're sure all yourself, buddy!"

"And to stay so, mate. Speaking of home—what I didn't find was Elsa. What I did find was this." He pulled a letter from the pocket of his blouse. "She left it. In this she lays the worst to you, Matt. It's so bad I can see what a lie it is—and how it makes a lie of all the rest she has said. She said too much in this. It made the thing top-heavy. It has tumbled over. She thought this letter would start me in earnest to kill you. It only shows how big a fool a woman can be when she lets herself go. I won't let you read it. I was thinking I would. But I won't. Such stuff doesn't belong in our friendship." He tore the letter into bits, dropped the fragments into Bowen's ash tray and lighted the tinder. He turned his back on the little blaze. "Matt, I don't want her back, after this. No more'n I want that letter back. She has gone with that woman. Let her stay with the hell cat now!"

"Who is she, Ken? Her aunt?"

"Damfino! I never heard of any Aunt Bella before. But you've heard my clean-up, Matt. Here's my paw and all that goes with it."

For a few moments they held the grip. Gravely, with sincere emotion, Gaylord said:

"I'm sorry they've got Elsa, Ken. I know you liked her a whole lot." It was the usual repressed expression of a man o' the woods, making reference to affection between man and woman. "But I reckon you cared for her as she was. What she has grown to be—well, it ain't so good, buddy. When a woman tries her best to sink a man instead of putting a pry under to lift him, she can't expect to pick much else than hell, and by her own choosing. I'm saying not a word about what she tried to do to me. I'll never mention her to you again."

"Now what's the job, Matt?" Gage

bravely turned his back on his domestic tragedy.

The chief's return gaze was full of tender understanding of his mate's fortitude.

"Here's how it stands, Ken. A special agent blew into town to-day and has taken away two prisoners and a load of seized dope. I can't use time to tell you the whole story now. The agent has gone crooked, so the word comes to me from Federal headquarters. He's got an hour's start of us, by this time. The United States marshal is on the way here. I'm hating to face him without the prisoners and the stuff. That's enough word to you, I reckon."

"Sure it's enough! What's orders?" The subaltern snapped to attention.

"It won't do us a bit of good to pound down the turnpike, chasing. That agent must know he can never go back to his job. He is joining the gang and has ducked away into the woods somewhere. My stamping ground seems to be right here, getting busy with the telephone. I'll call the sheriff and have him warn his men at Waller and other points. I'll have Phil pull together our boys in the north and plug the roads leading to Castol, as best he can. Marion's Chestnut Boy is in the tavern stable. Grab a saddle from the hostler and hustle top clip to Chesick. Lead back our horses. We'll be getting tips and we'll have to ride for all we're worth. You may pick up tips on the way to Chesick. Go to it, buddy."

He slapped Kenny's shoulder when the latter turned to leap toward the door. Then Matt applied himself to Bowen's office telephone.

High Sheriff Trask heartily promised his coöperation in this special case.

"I know an emergency when I bump into it and I'm doing no worrying about what the county commissioners may say," he rumbled over the wire. "And don't *you* worry, Matt, about the rabs dodging to the outside on any train.

You say the marshal is coming, hey? I'll hop on board his train at the shire and come up with him. Do your darnedest to keep them quill pigs from running out o' the woods."

"That's my big aim, Dave," pledged Matt.

Patrolman Phil, speaking from headquarters of the patrol service, promised to guard roads to the extent of his limited force, though only one man could be detailed to a road.

"But he'll pick his place, chief, and pump lead so fast he'll sound like an army."

Then Gaylord went out, and up and down the street, and enlisted a half dozen adventurous characters whom he had found available as aids in past times. He sent them to post themselves in a vantage point of ambush near the border not far from Dowling's place. Without betraying too much of his case, he warned them to be on the lookout for three men who might try to tote a load of something over to the Canadian side.

"Hold 'em up and send for me. Whatever howl is made I'll stand the brunt of it."

"Do you want us to stop anybody coming *from* Dowling's?" inquired one of the party.

Matt took time to run that aspect over in his mind. There were phases to consider. Already gunmen had filtered across the boundary, he knew, or would be coming. The operation of the grab-off through the complicity of a crooked special agent would be needing protection. There was the fake peddler to serve as go-between for Bernstein. And Bernstein, sticking in the region at large, had undoubtedly been finding opportunity to lay plans carefully.

Without question, as Matt viewed the situation after contact with Wagg, the agent had been taken into camp by the smugglers well in advance, and had merely been waiting for the occasion

when he could serve. Through some agency Bernstein knew that Wagg had gone crooked. Bernstein's manner, showing himself so openly in Quossoc, had proved his confidence in risking arrest on a Federal charge. The man's temporary blow-up in the horse-stealing case had clinched Matt's convictions as to that.

The phases flashed past in a few seconds of thought.

Yes, the gunmen would be coming! It might mean pitched battle—on the other hand there would be opportunity for a big round-up. The latter possibility bulked over all other considerations.

The officer's seriousness vanished in a broad smile.

"We mustn't keep labor out of the country, boys. If we let in rock breakers enough for the jails we may get a paved road between here and Waller Junction. If men come over from Dowling's, let 'em in."

The posse departed on the mission assigned.

Though Gaylord realized that his real duty lay in Quossoc where his brain could make plans, where his finger could be on the key, the action impulse became almost agonizing while he paced the streets of the village.

He met Marion Thorpe and walked with her along a side street while he confessed his furious eagerness to be out and on the chase.

"But your job is here at present, and you know it," was her rebuke.

"I do know it, of course. But I've got into the habit of doing things for myself, by myself, with these." He spread out his big hands and worked his fingers.

She diverted his thoughts, asking: "Is there anything more to tell me about Kenny? After what I saw on the street, I don't need to be told that he is himself once more."

"He's all right again. He's off on the

job. As to Elsa, he is letting her go her own way."

"I'm sorry for Elsa. But I'm glad for Ken." Again came one of the sage comments which he was accustomed to hear from her: "As I've said to you before, Matt, Ken was never wicked. But he was weak. Weak on account of Elsa. Almost every man, once in his life, at least, is obliged to fight a battle such as Ken's. Winning such a battle is usually a turning point and the man is stronger ever after."

"I'm hoping, Marion, that the big thing can be put over to-night. What you and I have talked about so much! It's going to mean a new life for Ken as well as me. I'll take him with me to the Telos. I can fix him all solid." He looked down into her thankful eyes. "Of course, the devilish business will go on again along the border—go on and on. Somebody with brains—more brains than I've got—may think up a way to stop it. You'll never think of me as a quitter, I hope, will you, dear?"

"No more than you'll ever think of me as a selfish siren." She smiled, then was serious again. "There are other men to take up what you are laying down, Matt—men who haven't a home or one in prospect. I know why you will quit. I thank Heaven because you'll do it—at the right time. And you think it's for to-night—the big thing?" She displayed tense anxiety.

While they sauntered slowly, he told her what the recent developments were, what his plans were. She did not protest against any point in those plans, not even his stand in allowing the gunmen to come and play a part, if they sought to cross the line.

"Well, after it's over nobody can twit you as being a quitter, Matt. So everybody else will be in my class on that point. I'm going to stay happy—and, oh, so hopeful!"

She kissed her finger tips and wafted the caress in his direction.

"By gad, you're a wonder among women!"

"I'm lucky, you thinking of me that way. Unlucky, though, for to-night, being only a woman." She made a grimace of disappointment.

"I promise you'll be in everything of mine after this night's job is over."

"As my proof that I won't be chasing you, I'll lend you my rifle. Come along to the house and get it." It was complete concurrence in his plans by her intrepid soul, and he blessed her with his eyes.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### READY FOR THE FUSE.

IN the first dusk came Kenny Gage into Quossooc, riding his horse with all speed. He was leading the chestnut. On Matt's horse a man was mounted.

Gaylord was pacing to and fro along the tavern porch, anxiously on the watch for his mate. The chief ran down the steps to meet the oncomers; he was wondering who this other man might be.

He was immediately informed. The man flung himself from the saddle and confronted Matt and did not need to name himself. He was United States Deputy Marshal Merrill. "Have you got a line on 'em yet?" he demanded eagerly.

"No, sir. A lot o' lines set but no yank up to date."

"I was hoping, Gaylord. But we'll hook 'em. We've got to, that's all."

"My notion, too, sir."

The three men went along with the horses toward the stable.

"What did that dirty crook of a Wagg tell you, Gaylord?" inquired the deputy marshal, adding a few well-chosen oaths and epithets.

"He reported you as called away from him on another case. Said that you'd probably meet him down the line."

"Well, I let myself be played for a blasted fool, when I ought to have

known better. I've been hearing hints about Wagg's crookedness. Told him so on our way up from the railroad. All in a friendly way, warning him. He laid the hints to muckers. It sounded fairly reasonable because those liars are always trying to frame Federal men. So I was sitting all easy, not distrustful of Wagg. Gaylord, they had got him before we started. That's plain enough to me now. Got him nailed for putting over this special job up here. He was primed and ready for me. It's a short story because I hate to dwell on it. He got me to take a little side jaunt off the turnpike. Said he'd been tipped off about an old abandoned camp where dope was cached to be run in on a short jump to the railroad. And inside that camp he beamed me with a blackjack and left me tied up.

"If a couple of bohunks hadn't come drifting along, I'd be there now. I plugged afoot as far as Chesick and met our friend Gage there. And that's how I'm here, and if those crooks get away from me and you and our crowd now, I'll fry old shoe tops and call it crow meat and eat it for the rest o' my life! And saying that, it reminds me I'm gad awful hungry. Let's talk across a table in that tavern."

The three started, after Matt had given orders about care of the horses.

"I haven't eaten supper, myself. Too anxious about buddy getting back."

At table Matt reported on what he done for the sake of a round-up.

"It all sounds good," indorsed Merrill, chewing vigorously on rare steak. "We ought to be able to set our teeth into 'em. Now let me give you the low-down on the gang. We've been nursing along the city end of it for a long time. Lately we've been missing a few of 'em out of the bunch. From the descriptions Gage has been giving me, I figure that two of 'em have been up here under the names of Bernstein and Banton."

"Ken has been doing some special work on general suspicion," stated Matt, getting a grateful look from the mate for that bit of situation glossing.

"Those names are as good as any," said Merrill. "I don't know what their real names are, and I hope they won't be needing names for some years to come, only numbers. And a third one, as Gage describes him, is up here, too. Cheeky and gabby."

"Yes, I had him pretty well sized up when I saw him peddling cheap jewelry on the street here," said Matt, generously keeping away from mention of the chap's maneuvering with Gage at Dowling's.

"And he shifts names like he changes collars, and that's often because he plays the dude," declared the deputy marshal. "Oh, he's a slicker, all right. Slick enough to get the 'Snow Queen' to fall for him."

He snapped glances to right and left, noting with satisfaction how much interest he had stirred in his listeners by mention of the nickname.

"I'm letting you boys in on what the office has been keeping mum about. You've the right to be posted now, when the clinch is about due, so it looks. Say, lads, unless we're all off count in the head office, the brains, the boss, the big noise in this gang is a woman. But we haven't been able to hang the ticket on the right one. She is called the 'Snow Queen' and 'Slick Jim' is married to her. But he has stalled the gumshoers by having half a dozen plant dames. The Snow Queen picks 'em and plants 'em. Keeps pulling in a new one. The more of an outsider, the better."

He shoved in a mouthful of potato as a chaser for a chunk of steak.

Gage exchanged glances with Matt. There was apology for himself, shame for Elsa in Kenny's gaze. Then he looked into his plate and picked at morsels of food with his fork, not raising eyes or utensil when Merrill went on.

"The big game seems to be centered up here at just this time. It took a good wad to pull in Wagg. It meant buying him away from the service. He'll have to chase himself across the border and stay there from now on. The money wasn't spent merely to give Wagg an airing. The job, whatever it is they have on, ought to be big enough to call the dame o' the brains up here. Have you boys any check-up on strange women hereabouts?"

Matt hastily replied for both.

"No, sir! I've been laying for a big kibosh for a long time. But I've never figured on a woman being the one I was after."

He kept himself from betraying his sudden suspicion from the Federal man. Handing out guesswork at that juncture could serve no official purpose. That guesswork would entail the disclosure of Kenny Gage's mournful secret.

"I'm afraid it's too much to hope for, that we can ever-catch her with the goods," confessed Merrill. "Probably she never looks twice the same. According to my notion, she handles the snow stuff after it has ducked across the border and is sneaked to the railroad. Lady drummer with big trunks, high-toned tourist, second-classer with bags and bundles—she is able to play all the easy games such as I can think of, and a lot more better ones, such as she can think up herself. She's a lot o' jumps ahead of us in the thinking line." He ran a hunk of biscuit around in his plate to sop up the last of the gravy, swallowed the morsel and pushed back from the table. "And now what, fellows?"

Matt looked at the window against which the night had plastered blank darkness.

"I'm sure on tiptoes as much as you are, sir. But if we start out doing any hell-telarrup stuff in one direction, the folks we want may be skedaddling the other way."

Merrill clicked his teeth and thumped the table with his fist.

"There's nothing sensible to do, and that's the blue cuss of it! What time does the mail stage get here?"

"About midnight."

"Marshal Danforth will probably come by the stage," he suggested grouchily. "He won't save any time by hiring a special hitch. And what in blazes is time worth here for him or for us, without we get tips? Come on out into the office and I'll buy the cigars. They're on me, all right, along with this bump on my bean." He rubbed his fingers on the sore spot. "The marshal will like my story about that bump—yes, he will, I don't think!"

The three found a corner for themselves in the big room and canvassed their puzzling predicament in low tones.

The usual stragglers of the evening came and went.

A man sauntered in, ostensibly without having any special business on his mind. He was one of the skirmish guard sent to the border by the officer. When the arrival caught Matt's eye he obeyed the patrolman's covert signal and strolled over into the corner.

"It's all right to speak out, Waddy," said Matt. "This gentleman is a United States deputy marshal. You have come to report, I take it."

"That's what. Some of that tough gang is over the line from Dowling's. They came dribbling past us, one by one. Guess they've got word to flock together some place. Jase Hasty is following the trail of one of 'em. Jase is taking his chances on ketching hot lead. But that's Jase. Always wants his mess well peppered."

In spite of his general anxiety, Matt chuckled. Hasty's character fitted his name. A long-legged straddle bug of a young chap, everlastingly chasing here and there on a quest, following his sharp snout of curiosity in scenting daredevil adventure.

Gaylord answered the query of Merrill's cocked eye.

"We sure have a good one in the field, sir. There's never any telling exactly what Jase will do, only that he'll pull something different."

"Shall I go back to the boys?" asked the emissary.

"You bet! Hustle to 'em, and then all of you chase along in the general direction Jase took. Looks like there'd be something doing in those woods."

Waddy went on his errand.

The deputy marshal kicked out resolute legs and urged that a start be made in some direction.

"The woods are big and dark, Merrill. We mustn't start off in the wrong direction," protested the patrolman. "And we'll be getting word from Hasty, or about him, mighty soon."

The word came sooner than Matt hoped for. The word came immediately.

Pete Saucier strolled into the tavern with a fine affectation of abundant leisure. He looked around and sauntered out. But Matt caught Pete's wink.

"Come on, men," Gaylord urged his companions. They followed him out of doors.

"Bo' soir," greeted Pete amiably when they overtook him. "I say eet queeck. Hasty, he say yo' come onto ma place. He's dere for wait teel yo' come. Dere's man he mus' tend to, so I come on de errand."

"You know your helpers, Gaylord, I'll say that!" indorsed Merrill.

"For maself, I say somet'ing," proceeded Saucier. "Jus' afore dark I haul ash stock onto ma way home. On de Keetch road I meet onto buckboard. T'ree men she ride. One o' dem, she was dat man I put up for yo', M'sieur Matt, and I was all so polite I feed heem wit' de spoon." He sputtered Canuck oaths. "But, ba damn, he shoot ma poor *cheval* 'fore I t'ink twice. *Oui!* *Cheval* so beeg, and he stan'

steel, so quiet. But, ba gar, I don't stand so steel! I ron, I jump! I jump, I ron! And de bollets dey wheez! Dat's pay I geet for what I do to be farst-rate polite and feed dat man!"

Matt whacked Pete's back.

"You'll get two horses for that, old pelter. Don't worry about where the money will come from. We're going on a collection trip."

Gaylord grabbed Merrill's arm and rushed him toward the tavern stable, Gage at their heels.

"He said the Keetch road, deputy. That means that Wagg and his pals have turned on their tracks. Yes, it means that the gang is flocking to a center." Gaylord was talking while they scurried. "Jase Hasty can give us the direction he took to follow the gunman. Jase and I have lined bees together in past times. This ought to be cherry pie, plenty sweet! The Keetch road, and what Jase can give for another direction! We'll line that honey tree, by the blue blazes!"

The three hurriedly saddled horses, Matt taking the chestnut and leading, when they set off for the Douglass road. The chestnut knew his way, the other horses followed.

In Saucier's shack the officers found a rather diverting tableau, lighted dimly by a smoky lantern. And there was a surprise in the tableau. The man with Hasty was not a common gunman. Jase had captured the slick jimcracker whom Merrill had named as the Snow Queen's husband.

He was serving as the passive figure in the tableau.

Hasty had secured the prisoner's hands behind his back and held the end of the cord. Sitting astride the back of a chair, Jase was tickling ears, nose and other points on a hideously contorted visage, using a talisman always carried by Hasty. It was a rabbit's foot. Jase had lashed it on the end of a pole.

"Somehow or other this critter has seemed to be terribly down in the dumps since I ketched him," the tormentor explained to the new arrivals. "I've been trying to tickle him back to concert pitch."

"Where'd you grab him, Jase?" demanded Matt.

"At Comas Four Forks, where the tote roads branch. Follered one o' the gang headin' in from Dowling's. This here feller"—Hasty dragged the rabbit's foot across the twisting countenance—"was waiting at the Forks, acting out signboard stuff. Sent the gang-man on by way o' the Skaggs' road. Then another came along later and swapped toodle-oo-dle calls and was sent along the Skaggs' road, too. That was pointer enough for me, I reckoned, and I jumped down on mister, here, from the tree I'd climbed near by while he was busy talking and—waal, here he is!" The teaser tickled the captive's nose until a fit of sneezing blocked the chap's curses. "Cheer up, I tell you," admonished Jase. "There's always good luck in a rabbit's foot."

Matt yanked his service map from his pocket and invited Merrill's attention, drawing intersecting lines with a pencil. At the intersection he twirled a circle.

"The old Skaggs' camp. Good place for a get-together. We may's well make it a general conference," he added tartly. "Come on."

"Do you want me to wait here with 'Gussie Gloom' and git him tickled up till he laughs it off?" Jase inquired of Gaylord.

"Oh, no. Brng him along. We're going to hoof it from here," stated Matt, taking command of the adventure. "Horses don't know how to soft-foot it."

The officer crossed to the prisoner and laid a heavy hand on his shoulder. There was no mercy in Gaylord's eyes of steel.

"Now, look here, man. Lives haven't been counting for a damn up this way lately. We're going into a clinch pretty soon and we're going to use you to the limit."

"Try to use me!" blustered the other. Jase's peculiar pleasantries had filled the fellow with vicious rage.

"There's no cheap threatening on my side," returned the officer. "I'm only warning you. It's up to you whether you live or die to-night. A lot of real men have died in this business up here. You can't expect a rat like you to get special favors."

Gaylord spun on his heel and ordered Gage to place the nags in Saucier's horse hovel.

Two minutes later the expedition was moving.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE BOMB EXPLODES!

GUIDED by Gaylord, with his accurate knowledge of the region, the party was able to skirt the Forks by way of trails and avoid the chance of running into gunmen who might be gathered, wondering which road to take. A shooting match with hired thugs would serve no real purpose and would undoubtedly scatter the covey which the officers were out to bag.

To make sure that no trouble was started, Matt told Hasty to gag the captive. Jase yanked off the city man's four-in-hand tie and tightly bound his jaws.

A half hour later Matt removed the bandage, setting his fingers under it, pulling it away roughly.

The officer had returned from a reconnoitering trip; he had left his party in a glen and had gone alone. He had made sure of the location of the Skaggs' camp. The place was dark, apparently untenanted, he learned.

"Man, you're going to do what I tell you to do," stated the officer, menace in his low tones.

Hasty stepped in front of the two and wrapped the cord about his wrist.

"Excuse me, Gaylord, but in teaming a balky critter you'll be needing a sharp gad. Better use me for the tool."

He whipped a gleaming hunting knife out of a sheath on his hip. To prove the sharpness of the weapon, he jerked the starched collar from the captive's neck, pinched the end of the collar between finger and thumb and sliced the fabric repeatedly, imitating the style of the old-fashioned barber in testing a razor's edge on a hair.

"I'm the right man for this job," added Jase, twisting his features into a malignant scowl, shoving his visage close to the city man. "I bought a ring off'm you in Quossoe for my best girl. And now she's branded with a black circle on her finger and has give me the go-by for being a cheap skate. I'm looking for an excuse to carve you, mister."

Matt relished the tart humor under this apparent ferocity, but the cowed prisoner perceived only the menace of knife and manner. Gaylord helped the situation by covert humor of his own and for Hasty's relish.

"Don't be letting yourself go off into one of your crazy spells, Jase. I don't want this man killed unless he brings it on himself."

"I feel a spell coming on, but if he's all soople on what you tell him to do, mebbe I can handle myself," promised Hasty; but he wagged his head as if uncertain about his power of control.

"All right. Here's what I'm telling you to do, my man," snapped the officer. "You know where you are. You know who's waiting in a camp close by. You have agreed on a call, of course. Give it."

There was no more bluff in the captive. In the gloom he looked into the grim faces close to his.

"They'll get me for it," he quavered. Jase flung an arm around the man's

neck and flashed the reflection of starlight on the blade of the big knife. "Toodle-oodle your song, you cuckoo! I heered you doing it all so sweet an hour or so ago. Sing, I tell ye! Go ahead and warble!"

The prisoner gave the call, but it was merely a hoarse squawk.

Jase pricked the man's leg with the point of the knife. On the heels of a yell of fright, the fellow called with a modulated yodel.

After a few moments he was answered in kind from the direction of the camp.

Jase obeyed Matt's nudge and pushed the prisoner along.

"Let's go, boys!" commanded Gaylord, clutching one of the city chap's arms. "Keep that call going." To the mates he said: "Have your guns in hand. Use bullets or butts, just as the thing calls for. We're past all fooling." He clicked his teeth on the final statement.

Near the camp Matt halted his party behind a fringe of small spruces.

From the inside of the camp a woman's voice asked:

"Is that you, Paul?"

Jase laid the edge of the knife against the throat from which he had ripped the collar.

"Yes," stuttered the captive. "Yes, it's Paul."

"But you sound queer!"

"I've had a scare."

His mouth close to the man's ear, Matt whispered:

"Ask her to let you in quick."

"Let me in, Madge. Let me in!" parroted the terrified hostage.

With Matt and Jase propelling him, Paul ran to the camp and the three stood at one side of the plank door, Gage and the deputy backed against the log wall on the other side.

They heard the bar fall; the door swung open.

The interior was dimly illuminated

by a lantern; shutters had concealed the light until then.

The attackers flung Paul ahead of them and rushed the place, crouching.

Matt had eyes only for Banton and Bernstein; the two had leaped in panic for the same corner.

Merrill, avenging the bump on his head, made Wagg the special object of his attack.

Kenny Gage, a gun in each hand, halted in the middle of the room in order to allow no odds to the defending garrison.

By taking this precaution he was able to bore Banton's arm when that ever-ready gunman made a play to shoot Gaylord while the latter leaped forward to attack. Bernstein had pulled, but before he could lift his weapon Matt struck him down with the butt of a revolver.

Banton had dropped his gun and was squealing in pain while he clasped his left hand on the wounded right arm. He was out of the fight, but Gage followed Matt's example and floored Banton with a gun butt.

"Tie 'em up, Jase," commanded Matt. "And twist a loop around that arm to stop the blood. We're taking these hellions in alive!"

He swung to see how Merrill was making it. The deputy had downed Wagg and was handcuffing the agent. Wagg was senseless.

"I handed him two cracks, Gaylord," stated the deputy marshal, rising. "And now my own bump doesn't ache so bad."

He turned from Matt and strode toward a dim corner where Elsa was huddled with the putative aunt. "Two dames in it, hey?"

Merrill barked at the elder woman:

"Cornered at last! That's you, Snow Queen. You can't duck this time, or lie out of it." He vented the triumph of one whose long quest was ended. "And I'm thinking this husband of

yours will be turning State's evidence on top of the rest of the help he's been giving us."

The deputy jerked a thumb gesture over his shoulder, designating the wretch who had crouched in a far corner, his hands still pinioned. He bleated:

"I couldn't help it, Madge! They had me. I couldn't help it!"

Again Merrill rasped his tongue over the raw spot of the situation.

"Oh, he'll turn the evidence, all right-o. A handy husband!"

"Be sensible, Madge! I had to do it," whimpered the culprit.

She stepped past Merrill, pushing aside his barring arm.

"Your same old whine!" she charged, shaking her fist at the man in the corner. "Every time the same, when you've double-crossed me. And now you're ready to double-cross me in court, too!"

She was letting herself go to the limit of fury. Dammed grudges burst the barriers. With the swiftness of a dabbing cat, she jerked a gun from the covert of her riding boot and fired at the man in the corner, emptying the automatic before Merrill was able to wrench it from her clutch. After a struggle he secured her with handcuffs; his belt under his coat was a storage for manacles.

He looked from her to the limp body in the corner.

"You've sure fixed it now so you'll never handle snow again."

"I'll face court on my own, at any rate—not queered by a double-crosser," she snarled.

The shooting had manifestly stirred much interest outside the camp. A man was shouting from the darkness.

Matt hastened to say:

"I reckon some of the gang from Dowling's have been laying low outside, Merrill."

The suggestion served to tip off the woman leader's hysteria. She screamed:

"Rush the camp, boys!"

Merrill had raised his hand to stop her mouth with a palm. But he obeyed Matt's gesture and refrained. She was serving the officers' purposes as well as her husband had done.

"They've hooked me, boys! Come shoot it out! I'll take my chances."

Immediately a fusillade signaled the attack; there was the sound of bullets hitting the log walls.

"Give 'em the same medicine, men," Gaylord urged.

Disregarding danger, the three officers pumped lead from the doorway.

From a distance a voice hallooed:

"It's Waddy, Matt! The boys are with me. Shall we shoot?"

"Every ounce you're lugging!" bawled Gaylord.

Assault from the rear barked in staccato. That battle ended as suddenly as it began. The hired gunmen scattered and fled.

Waddy stalked into the camp presently and reported:

"We stood behind trees and fired at their flashes, Matt. None of us got hit. The boys have grabbed a few live ones. Now they're hunting in the brush for the deaders."

"I'm leaving the clean-up to you lads. I'll have to be starting for Quossoc with these special prisoners."

The chief of the aids went to his work.

Matt followed Gage out of the camp; the latter had resolutely kept his eyes off Elsa who was sitting in her corner, face to the log wall.

"Well, buddy, what say?" asked Matt, laying a hand on Kenny's shoulder.

"I'm not changing what I said to you in Dan Bowen's office, Matt. She and I can't start over again. And I don't believe she wants to." His tone was mingled grief and bitterness.

Matt waited a few moments, then he went back into the camp.

Merrill stopped him. "What about the other woman?"

"I'm asking a favor of you, Merrill. Let me handle her case. I'll explain later when we have the time."

"It's O. K. with me, whatever you do, Gaylord. After what you've done in turning this trick, I'll roll over and sneeze when you order."

Forthwith there was bustle in and about the camp. Merrill, Gage and Hasty conveyed the prisoners to the wagon on which the trunks of contraband had been toted. The horses were hitched in.

Matt went to the corner and leaned over Elsa. He gazed down into the visage of terror; tears had mottled the rouge.

"Anything you want to say?" he asked gently.

Her features ridged into hardness.

"What's the use? And there's nothing I want to say. I left everything behind me when I rode out of Quossoc. I want it to stay behind."

"Thank you! You're suiting Kenny. As a friend I tell you that. And I'm doing more. You don't belong in this mess, and I'm letting you out of it. For Ken's sake, mostly. You know that, of course."

"I naturally can't expect you to do anything for my own sake," she returned snappishly.

"Have you any money?"

"All I want."

"You can have the horse you rode here on. You know this region. Go where it suits you."

She rose and faced him. She narrowed her eyes. Now he was realizing how much adamant she had hidden behind feminine softness in the past.

"You hope you're sending me to the devil, Gaylord. Oh, no, you're not! I've been through all that stuff, cooped in Quossoc, washing dishes and darned socks for one of you border beggars." She taunted him with a smirk. "I know the way to Dowling's place specially well. Even in the night. I have

sent all my clothes over there, already. And if you happen to look up into the sunshine to-morrow and see a bird with fine feathers flying away into the big world, that'll be Elsa, all free and very happy—*Handsome!*" She opened her mouth in the manner of an angry cat and spat the last word at him.

When the expedition was on its way later along the Skaggs' road, Elsa's horse cantered past. Deputy Merrill made no comment.

At midnight the two men of the State patrol, with the deputy, greeted United States Marshal Danforth when he jumped down from the up stage.

"Well, what kind of Tophet is to pay up here, men?"

"Would you mind stepping over to the jail, marshal?" invited Merrill. He chuckled. "A fisherman can tell a better story when he shows what he's got in his creel."

"Will you excuse me from going along, Marshal Danforth?" pleaded Matt. "I still have a small matter to attend to."

Merrill broke into the marshal's friendly protests.

"I'd rather not have him present, sir,

*Who was the mysterious roughrider out of the West who excelled so in log rolling,*

*horsemanship, and heart winning? For the answer, read "Show Man,"*

*by Clay Perry, in the first December number—an up-to-date*

*story of love and action.*

when I report to you. He might blush so hot that he'd set the jail on fire."

Matt grabbed that opportunity to duck away into the night. There was a beacon for him in the window of the Thorpe house. He knew it would be alight. He called, and the door was flung open before he reached it.

He swept Marion into his arms, lifted her and carried her into the sitting room.

Ten minutes later, at his earnest command, she brought paper, pen and ink and set them down.

Under his gaze, while he bent over her, she wrote his resignation from the service. Then, after a smiling, teasing glance at him, she wrote a postscript for the eyes of the chief at the State house and signed her own name. It was a bride-to-be's excellent reason why Matthew Gaylord was leaving his job.

After she had sealed the envelope she kissed the flap. With brimming eyes she returned Matt's ecstatic gaze.

"Well, pal o' mine," he said, "I reckon that's the first time a resignation ever went into headquarters with a kiss instead of a kick."



### WHAT TOURISTS WANT TO SEE

If you were a tourist visiting for the first time Washington or Paris, what points would you be most eager to see? The first three sights sought by Europeans who come to Washington during the winter are the Lincoln Memorial, the White House and Senator Borah. From France comes the report that the first three things Americans in Paris look for are Napoleon's tomb, the home of the French president, and the palace where President Wilson resided during the peace conference following the World War.



# “TANKS, GENTLEMEN”

by Harry Irving Shumway

*Author of “The Very Audacity of Him,” Etc.*

A strange and amusing setting for a great American game.

IT was eleven thirty in the evening and the usual thick quiet was over Doomsley-on-Meuze, pall-like. Once in a while the staccato footsteps of a guard echoed along the stone-flagged corridors, but that was all. The occupants of the cells were supposed to be asleep, getting rested up for the next day of going nowhere.

Up in Murderers' Row it wasn't so darkly still, however. Low mumbles of conversation came from cells 1311 and 1313; one a deep, growling bass and the other a whispering tenor. Sweet sleep had not perched soothingly in the residences of "Tubby" Jilkes and "Peeler" Jurniken.

"'S all right," hoarsely assured Peeler. "That guard won't be down here for fifteen minutes. You was sayin' somethin' about an interlocatory grip?"

"Yeah," cautiously returned the

higher voice of Tubby. "I read about it in a magazine. You lap the little finger of your right hand around the forefinger of your left, see. And—Cheese it! Is he comin'?"

"T'hell wit' him. Go on."

"Well, this grip, y'see, keeps your club from slippin'. It can't turn or blam goes your wrist. It's a darb. I tried it and I ain't been off of the fairway but twice. Yessir, it's a darb."

Peeler Jurniken, one-time terror of the underworld—and upper, for that matter—considered. Faint sounds came from within his darkened cell. Tubby wondered what he was doing.

"What you at, Peeler?" he whispered.

"I can't get the damn thing, nohow. That's the finger 'Wuzzy' Silberg bit in that scrap we had. I wished I'd 'a' knocked him off, now. Lessee; little finger of your right hand—"

"What you usin' for a club, Peeler?"

"The bars of this lousy cell, whatcha suppose? Dammit, the warden should ought to leave us have our clubs in the cells, and then we could get some practice swings, anyway. An hour a day ain't nothin' at—"

Suddenly a new voice snapped out of the dimness.

"What's the idea of tryin' to bust out on us? Looney or something?"

"Honest, Jim," explained Peeler, "I was only tryin' some new interlocatory grip that Tubby—"

"Well, you bozos have been chinnin' for an hour. Can it."

"Yes, sir."

The guard glared at Peeler for a minute, then turned and walked away. The two listened until his footsteps seemed safely elsewhere.

"I told you to be careful," warned Tubby.

"Stow your tripe!" hissed Peeler. "If I ever get that guy— Say, I'd give an ear to bounce a mashie off his dome!"

"Sh! I think he's sneakin' back."

Silence, long and profound. The creak of a body easing into a hard cot, then labored breathing—manufactured. A cautious step outside the door. Then a creeping retreat.

"The big stiff!" incautiously drifted out from the gloom of Peeler's cell. "All I'd ask would be one wallop with a niblick—"

"Sh!"

Creaks—sighs—then snoring. Sleep had come. The residents of 1311 and 1313, Doomsley-on-Meuze, were in the benign hands of the sandman.

It might be interesting to note how golf had come to Doomsley-on-Meuze. It hadn't been a part of the curriculum with the charter members. Indeed, niblicks and back-stop mashies were things unknown when Doomsley began its career, housing—and sometimes hanging—the guests who came to spend more

or less extended vacations within its gruesome walls. It was so old that thumbscrews and black-snake whips wouldn't be unthinkable. But now—golf!

The magic wand of the wealth of old Marmaduke Anlicker had done the trick—in a will. Once, there was a rumor, Marmaduke had spent a few months on the inside looking out, and the impression made on his soul had cried out loud with its indelibility. And when he died he left six hundred thousand dollars, that the inmates of at least one prison should taste of the free air and sunshine at his favorite sport.

"There'll be little croaking," he wheezed on his last bed, to his lawyer. "No heirs that amount to anything. But I want this thing iron-clad and steel-riveted. I've spoken to the governor and the warden about it. They're in favor of the idea, too. This six hundred thousand will be ample for a good nine-hole course right next to the prison—and will pay to build a wall around it, too—if it's needed."

He paused over that last statement, then grinned. "But maybe they won't need a wall. No golfer ever wants to shoot out of bounds."

And that was how the noble and ancient pastime came to Doomsley. The operating expenses were little or none; the convicts took care of the greens—and no better putting areas existed anywhere. Clubs were provided from an equipment fund.

But the feature de luxe was a two-handled silver cup as big as an umbrella holder, given for the best score in the annual tournament. The winner kept it for the ensuing year; it was the badge of his supremacy as a golfer. He had to hand it over to his successor at the conclusion of the next year's tournament. And it became the permanent possession of the player who won it three times in succession.

Of course only honor men—regard-

less of what crime they were in for—could play. A single serious infraction of the rules of the prison and the privileges of the links were canceled for a month or even longer. Oh, golf was making Doomsley-on-Meuze a model prison.

The next day Peeler and Tubby beat it for the links at twelve sharp.

"Maybe we can get in nine holes, if some of these stiffs will get a move on," remarked Tubby. "We're signed up to leave the first tee at twelve eight."

"I'm gonna learn this interlocatory grip or bust somethin'!" said Peeler.

"Interlockin', not interlocatory," Tubby corrected him. "If your fingers is stiff, run your left thumb down under the palm of your right hand."

The two gentlemen from Murderers' Row hustled up to the corrugated-iron clubhouse and demanded service of the club and bag custodian—a trusty, and an insignificant person segregated from society for a mere paltry embezzlement.

"Come across with them same clubs, bozo!" snapped Peeler. "And don't try slippin' any left-handed tools on me, like you did last time. It near ruined me."

The trusty grinned feebly. "A mistake. How about some of these new wooden tees? They're only five cents a dozen."

"You dude!" sneered Tubby. "You think we're afraid to soil our hands with good sand? Be yourself!"

"Well, I only suggested—"

"Keep your suggestions among the sawdust between your ears," retorted Tubby. "C'mon, Peeler. It's twelve five now. Only three minutes more."

A guard stood by the first tee, a card in his hand. His cold eye rested on the two ambling hastily toward him.

"You're next," he called. "And no hurry. There's a foursome ahead of you."

Peeler and Tubby glared out on the dazzling fairway, annoyed.

**POP—6B**

"That's 'One-eye' Cazzone, the big ape. And 'Scarface' Goldberg with him. Who's the other two bimbos?"

"Visitors," explained the guard. "And don't forget the amenities of the links, gentlemen."

Tubby and Peeler stared at him.

"Visitors? What d'you mean? Ain't these our links?"

The guard shifted his sawed-off shotgun and swung it with the grip you'd use on a short chip shot.

"There's a new agreement between Doomsley and Lunscombe Reformatory. Special honor men from Lunscombe will be permitted to visit here and play once a month. Only a few. That's until they get their own links."

The two digested this. Peeler swung his driver viciously. "That's some underhanded work. Our links is crowded too much now. If they're gonna dump these lousy Lunscombe bums on—"

"Another thing," interrupted the guard. "Any Doomsley gentleman who fails to treat a Lunscombe gentleman in a gentlemanly manner will have the privileges of the links taken away for an indefinite period."

"Meanin'," said Peeler, "that if I bounce a niblick off of some Lunscombe guy's hat, I don't play no more golf."

"Correct."

Peeler swallowed a great lump; his hulking frame shivered. "That's a stiff dose, but I gotta take it. I've only been playin' at this golf for three weeks, but I—it's got me!"

"Come on, Peeler," urged Tubby. "Snap out of it. Toss you for the honor."

"Take it yourself. I want to practice this interlocatory grip."

Tubby teed up a ball and shot a beauty, one hundred and seventy-five yards down the fairway. Peeler shook his head in admiration.

"Geez, if I could only do that! Funny, I been swingin' clubs and sand-

bags all my life, but this thing just slays me."

He teed up a ball, took a stance that might have gone well with a rather bellicent Horatius at the Bridge, and menaced the air with his driver.

"Hey, you guys!" he bellowed down the fairway.

The guard whistled. "Can that! Remember what I said about visitors. Holler 'Fore!' when you shoot."

Peeler choked.

"Fore!" he shouted—and added some embellishments under his breath, mainly about the ancestry of the foursome ahead.

With a mighty swish that would have cracked the toughest skull, down came his club. It missed the little ball by six inches; and Peeler's astonishment was painful. The guard, not being a caddy or a Lunscombe gentleman, laughed coarsely, swinging his shotgun gracefully the while. Peeler's eyes gleamed red; but he said nothing.

"Now wait a minute," said Tubby. "You're all wet. First thing, you tried to kill the ball, and it can't be done. Next, you lifted your head. Watch me. Head down, and only a half-swing at first. Now try it again."

Peeler did—and the ball arced down the fairway a good hundred yards.

"See!" remarked Tubby. "Not bad. You can't expect distance at first."

"On your way, gentlemen," grinned the guard. "And don't forget the amenities due the Lunscombe gentlemen."

At the third hole it looked as if the amenities were going to be tried and found wanting. A surprisingly long and beautiful iron shot by Peeler sailed just over the foursome's heads and zipped on toward the green. The four turned and waited for Peeler and Tubby to come up. The situation looked extremely pregnant with possibilities.

Big One-eye Cazzone was swinging a short-shafted mashie in one hand. Scarface Goldberg had been stooping

over for a chip shot but straightened up. The other two birds, strangers, said nothing. Peeler strode right up to One-eye. The one-eyed one smiled and waved a hand.

"Great shot, Peeler," he said. "Musta been a good hundred and sixty yards. Say, you fellers play right through us. We're four and much slower."

Peeler reddened and gulped under this unlooked-for generosity. "Tanks," he mumbled.

Then Scarface Goldberg added a note. "Wantcha to meet a couple guests of ours," he said. "This is 'Porchy' Lewis, one of the best second-story workers in the business. And this is 'Bam' Klitchmann. Guess you've heard of him—the sashweight specialist. Boys, meet Tubby Jilkes and Peeler Jurniken."

"Pleased to meetcha!" chorused everybody.

Tubby took up the torch of his own team's decorum. "We ain't in any hurry. Tanks for your kind offer, One-eye."

"Thassall right. Go ahead."

"Say," suddenly spoke up Peeler. "Couldn't we make it a sixsome—hey?"

"Can't be done," said Scarface. "Wish we could. But the rules say a foursome is the limit."

"Well, we'll go through—gentlemen," remarked Tubby. "And much obliged."

"Not at all," chorused the foursome.

"Tanks—gentlemen," said Peeler, feeling he had pleasantly weakened somewhere in his inner being. He would never be the same again.

The pair played on. Doomsley had gone through Lunscombe, and there had been no fireworks whatever. To be sure, Peeler took four putts on an easy green, just after that, but that was all. He was surprised at himself; the unadulterated purity of his make-up seemed to have been frightfully let down by some insidious substance. Gentlemen of the links! What th' hell!

They spent a wonderful hour, getting in their nine holes and two over.

"Add 'em up," said Tubby. "I'm a forty-nine for the nine holes."

"I got a fifty-eight," moaned Peeler, and he might have been surprised if he had known it was the first time the emotion of pure regret had ever assailed him. "Say, is fifty-eight pretty fierce?"

Tubby shuddered. "It's lower than sluggin' an old lady doin' the blind cup-game on a corner. Until you bust into the forties for nine holes you're just the same as a leper."

"Well, when I get this interlocatory grip eatin' out of my hand, maybe I'll click right. Geez, I wish we could do nine more holes."

A tall, gray man was standing at the first tee as the two passed by on their way back to incarceration. Warden Ginley motioned for Peeler to come over to him.

"I heard from your lawyer to-day, Jurniken," he said, solemnly but kindly. "He says to keep up hope, that he's seen the governor and has another appointment with him some time soon."

Peeler sobered, but he wasn't one to show emotion. His eyes roved around the links, the one bright and sunny spot that he felt he had ever known.

"Well, it won't be long now," he said, and swung off toward the dreary home. The warden shrugged. He felt a little sorry for the hulking figure.

The average citizen—or shall we say the free and untrammeled citizen—generally lays siege for the eighties with practically the same whole-souled vehemence that Sherman used in his march to the sea. And that bird has plenty of time. Imagine, then, the verve that Peeler put into one hour per day—with a legal period to punctuate his golfing career looming up in the near future. Ah, the layman little knows the terrors of prison life. Only a golfer can appreciate it.

So Peeler went at it, a man with only one idea. He had a swing that any golf pro would have envied. All he needed for distance was timing and the nicety of handling. His putting was bothersome.

"Why in hell didn't I take up safe-breakin'?" he grumbled. "All those babies have a touch like a mother's hand. I'm too strong for puttin'."

"Just let the blade kiss the ball," explained Tubby. "See? Follow through—easy. You'll get it."

And Peeler did. He sweated mightily for it. His iron shots seemed to come natural. And so one day he sailed in with a forty-seven for nine holes.

"This—this is—"

"Yeah. I know," said Tubby. "It's the proudest moment of your life. Shake, old trouper."

Again Warden Ginley happened to be at the club house. He spent a good deal of his time on the links of Doomsley; it had a great fascination for him. His cool gray eyes were sparkling.

"That was a beautiful recovery you made out of that brook, Jurniken," he smiled.

"Say, warden, I thought I'd have to drop a ball and lose a stroke. But I took a chance and just clipped her out of the water."

"Remarkable. Your game is coming along fine."

Peeler seemed to expand, like a rose under a sudden warm shower. His feelings almost choked him; never had he been so overcome before.

"Say—say, warden, do you think I'm—that I'm any good? Say, d'you think I—"

"I've never seen anybody improve so fast. That water shot was worthy of Hagen."

"Oh, warden! Say—say—geez, I feel—"

The warden waved a hand and sobered. "About that other matter. Your lawyer—"

Peeler seemed to shrink; shivered a little, but straightened his shoulders manfully. Golf had such a way of completely obliterating some of the terrible things of life; and then the inevitable awakenings were staggering.

"Can't anything be done, warden?" Peeler's soul was speaking. "I'll tell you. I wanna play in that tournament July 1st. It's the only thing I ever wanted—bad. And"—he gulped—"it may be—too late."

"We're in the hands of the gods, Jurniken. We're toys manipulated by an intricate legal machinery. I'll see what I can do. I'm sorry. As a golfer myself, I know how you feel."

"Tanks, warden."

No golfer ever worked harder at his game in the ensuing weeks than Peeler did. The shadow looming over him acted more like a tonic, a potent elixir, than a hobble. He must conquer his weaknesses, must smooth out his putting. The precious daily hour found him sweating in all his fiber, studying every fault and angle of his playing.

One by one the corners were lopped off. It was incredible, the progress he made. He even passed Tubby, no mean player himself.

"You gotta darker past than I thought," said Tubby, one rare afternoon in June. "Been hidin' somethin' on me."

"Whatcha mean?" growled Peeler.

"You played at this game before. You was one of them chaise-lunge lizards in short pants before you hit the toboggan. And I thought you was born tough!"

"You're a liar!" boomed Peeler, a menacing putter in one hand. "I never seen the game until I struck this cooler."

"Yeah. You're probably ashamed of your old life. I know. I once played the organ in a church, when I was a boy. I know. You can't fool me."

"Is zat so? Well, you're only sore

because I'm mowin' you down. I got a forty-three for nine holes yesterday. That's what's the matter with you."

"Sure. Why not? You probably been playin' all your life before you went hard-boiled."

"Lay off of that, you wart! I tell you I never seen a golf stick up to two months ago."

"Well, it's funny; that's all."

"Yeah? And I'll tell you somethin' else: I'm gonna cop that silver cup, see?"

"With what the warden says is gonna happen—"

"Lay off of that, too," hissed Peeler. "I ain't thinkin' about that; and don't you talk about it, neither, or I'll ruin you. Now, I'll show you somethin' else. See that old pin up there? It's a hundred 'n' forty-five yards, easy. Two bunkers and a trap in the way. Watch me."

Peeler set himself. He was a grim golfer. More than that: a merciless, unconquerable golfer. The swing was lusty and the answering click of rubber against steel the note of a symphony. Up went the ball, and on a perfect line; it dropped dead four feet from the pin. Peeler turned and leered at the open-mouthed Tubby. Tubby had a brief struggle—who knows against what emotions?—and then he grinned, with no reservations. He would never have any again.

"My jack is on you, Peeler," he said. "And I take back what I said about you playin' before. You're just a natural-born golfer. No mistake."

"Tanks, Tubby." The big man sighed. "If I'd only known about this golf thing before."

The Doomsley Silver Cup Tournament began on July 1st and finished on the Fourth, Independence Day. Nine holes each day, and the best score for the thirty-six holes won. No handicaps. And no alibis—because a better job on

fairways and greens had never been done before. Doomsley smiled for the event.

"Nervous?" asked Tubby.

Peeler took the kinks out of his joints with a few practice swings that swished like bullets.

"Who? Me? I'm as cool as the night I knocked 'Red' Guffy for a yard of tripe. And I was zero then."

"But I mean about—about— Have you heard anything new from your lawyer?"

Peeler shivered; set his teeth. "Lay off. I ain't thinkin' about nothin' but this here tournament, see? I've got to do a row of forty-twos or better. One-eye Cazzone is doin' that good."

"Yeah. And 'Strangler' Higgs is doin' better. He got a forty-one two days ago."

Warden Ginley sped the first two golfers on their way.

"Boys, do your best. You're on your honor in keeping score. And don't forget golf is a gentleman's game. Shoot!"

Peeler was paired with Scarface Goldberg. The warden nodded grimly to Peeler as he teed up his ball.

"No word yet, Jurniken. Steady."

Again that shadow. It seemed so little to ask—just to play four short rounds of golf. And then let it come. He wouldn't mind. He could go out with the satisfaction of having done something worth while at last.

Peeler shook himself together; scowled down the fairway, where other figures were growing smaller. With a grim effort he gathered his wits.

*Swish! Click!* The sounds that cheer a golfer's heart. Up, up and away, away and a roll—straight as an Indian's arrow.

"Beauty!" exclaimed the warden. "A good two hundred and twenty-five yards, if it's an inch."

"Go ahead, Scarface," said Peeler. "There's somethin' for you to shoot at."

Scarface did shoot at it—but fell short of its glory by fifty yards.

Peeler did the first four holes in fours. Scarface was almost as good—four, five, five, four—darned good golf. They played in near silence. It was on the fifth hole that they first spoke. A stymie caused it. Scarface attempted to putt out of Peeler's way.

"Hey, I'm away!" yelled Peeler. "None of that!"

"I was only helpin' you along. You couldn't putt around me," replied the aggrieved Scarface.

"No favors. T'anks just the same. I'm playin' to win right; and all the soft spots is out. Watch me jump over it."

He did—mashed his ball like leap-frog, right over Scarface's ball. A beautiful shot.

"Great stuff!" said Scarface. "A birdie. And I gotta laugh myself happy with a six."

They finished the first day's round; Peeler, forty, Scarface, forty-four. There was only one other as good as forty—Strangler Higgs.

"There's nothin' on that guy's mind," grunted Tubby. "He's in for life. O' course he can go out and rap out a forty. How d'you feel, Peeler?"

"Great."

"Not—worryin' about anything?"

"Say, if you're a friend of mine, just lay off remindin' me about—about anything but this here tournament. I'm O. K. The only thing that's frettin' me is a slice I get once in a while. Got into the rough twice to-day, or I'd busted into the thirties."

"You're goin' great, Peeler. Great. Just keep your mind off— Just keep right on knockin' 'em, boy."

The second day Peeler was paired with Strangler Higgs. Strangler, who could knock off a wife as well as he could chip a ball right up to the pin, was no mean opponent. Iron nerves and good form. He grinned at Peeler.

"They tell me you're good, big boy," he said. "Improvin' every day. Now watch me and you'll learn somethin'."

"I'll be in right there, feller; and you can get a few points day after to-morrow, when I take the cup."

"Yeah—if you're there."

Peeler scowled and the knuckles of his hands showed white as he gripped his driver. What he would have said died before it was born, because the warden sent them on their way. A rough one, this day. Strangler wasn't the thoughtful opponent that Scarface was. Peeler came in for a riding from his opponent. And the Strangler never knew how near he was to getting an immediate commutation to his long sentence—one that didn't come from the governor, either.

The iron nerve of Peeler saw him through, although he had to take a trimming from the smooth-playing Strangler. He got a forty-three to the Strangler's forty-one. And that, under the circumstances, was a victory for Peeler. Strangler only had to play golf.

But the third day Peeler struck his form. Playing with "Fancy" Harry, a real nice guy in for a little careless art work resembling Uncle Sam's well-known currency, he unwound a mean thirty-eight. Not a slice or a hook. And a miser with the old putts.

"I got that puttin' business now, Tubby," he told his pal. "'Muggsy' Dunker, the safe cracker, told me to sandpaper my fingers. It did the trick. I got a touch now like a piano hound. Grabbed off a birdie on the second and another on the eighth."

"All you gotta do now is hold everything. Strangler blew in with another forty. So you're one to the good, see? Worryin' any?"

Peeler glared at him. "No, I ain't. Why should I?"

But the blow fell that night. The warden sent for him, and the official's face told the news.

"Had a telephone from your lawyer, Jurniken," he said. "He's been trying to get the governor. Says he has an appointment with him at ten to-morrow."

Peeler swallowed a couple of dry lumps. "Ten? The tournament starts at twelve. You couldn't start it—a couple hours—"

"Sorry, Jurniken. Rules are rules, you know. Not a ball flies until twelve sharp."

Peeler slumped. His sunburned face went a few shades lighter.

"I'll do the very best I can for you, Jurniken. You know I will."

"Tanks, warden. Maybe—they'll hold off—"

"You get a good night's sleep, man. And go out there and play the game. I'm warden of this jail; and if it's humanly possible, you'll play. Now, go out and win."

That final round of the Doomsley Annual Silver Cup Tournament was a classic—as far as Peeler Jurniken went. From the first shot, a beauty of two hundred and thirty yards straight down the fairway, he clicked at every point. Drives, irons, approaches, putts—they all rang sweet.

"You're layin' 'em like a doormat, Peeler," called Tubby, as they met on the sixth hole. "I just heard about Strangler. He's shootin' better than a forty. But so are you. Take him for a nice ride, boy."

"I'll get a thirty-eight or die," snapped Peeler.

They exchanged glances.

"You'll get a thirty-eight," answered Tubby.

But Peeler did even better. He clipped one stroke off his third day's performance, sailing home on a fine thirty-seven! He collapsed on the ninth hole, and somebody had to throw a bucket of water on him. Even his iron nerve had snapped under the strain.

Six hours later Warden Ginley stood up at his desk and greeted No. 1738, Peeler Jurniken. There was a big two-handled silver cup on the desk. Both men looked at it.

Warden Ginley held a paper in his hand.

"Well, they held off."

"Yes, sir; they held off," said Peeler.

"The cup. You won it; but you can't take it with you."

Peeler's eyes rested on the shining trophy. He was tremendously proud of it. Never before in his life had he been so proud of anything. It signified so much.

"No, warden, I can't take it with me," sighed Peeler. "But—I might come back and see it—some time."

The warden started. "Well, we'll say good-by now."

*If you would like to read another story by Harry Irving Shumway, watch these pages in future issues.*

He held out his hand. Peeler grasped it.

"So long, warden."

The warden picked up the paper on his desk.

"I'm glad this thing we'd been looking for came when it did. It's the first time in my life I ever remember wishing a pardon would hold off. Of course, we knew you couldn't play in the tournament a minute after you were no longer officially a prisoner. It came just right, eh, Peeler?"

"Righto, warden," grinned Peeler. "I'm off now. Good-by, old cup. See you again."

"It'll be here, Peeler. Good-by—and good luck."

Peeler grinned again, as he turned to go.

"Au revoir, warden!"

### FIVE MILLION DOLLARS' WORTH OF ORATORY

RIGHT when statesmen and college professors are declaring that the day of American oratory is ended, Representative James P. Buchanan, of Texas, goes before a committee of Congress and turns loose a flood of golden speech which persuades that body to report favorably a bill appropriating five million dollars, to be spent in fighting the cotton boll worm in his State.

The concluding paragraph of the eloquent outburst with which he knocked his fellow Solons cold was this:

"I think that when God Almighty created this world, and when He created the United States, He was in a good humor and smiled. He gave us a salubrious climate; He gave us fertile soil; He implanted within the bowels of the earth every mineral that is useful to mankind; He abundantly fructified it with teeming water, so that the sun, in its majestic course, does not look down upon a fairer land or one more capable of administering to the wants and gratifying the luxuries of man. When He created it, He gave us cotton. He gave us a climate and a soil which gave us a monopoly in the production of cotton, that fair white staple intended by Almighty God to clothe a naked world. Ah, it is fairer, better, and more serviceable than the fleece which Jason sought! Now, after being blessed with this great gift, are we going to sit by and permit an insignificant bug from India to rob us of God's priceless gift? I thank you."

The day of oratory ended? It has just begun when a speech like that is worth five million dollars; and the man from whose tongue such imperial utterance falls deserves a seat alongside of Cicero, Demosthenes, and William J. Bryan, form of 1896.



# *The HOUND of the MACRAES*

by Meade Corcoran

A blackly proud Scottish chieftain fiercely covets his host's most cherished possession.

EVAN MACRAE said to his guest that he must take home the big buck that Cavack, Macrae's hound, was pursuing along the slope of Scronacro. Allan Campbell did not thank his host. He was thinking that even a thirteen-tined buck was no great matter as a gift. Any man with luck might bring down the like himself, but neither luck nor love nor money had brought the Campbells a hound like Cavack. Why should a Macrae have a hound a Campbell coveted?

"The buck isn't yours yet," Allan Campbell said sourly to his host.

"Isn't that the truth?" Macrae was amused, when he should have been apologetic.

Allan's thick neck swelled up to his ears. Did Macrae think a Campbell did not know a great dog when he saw one? The Campbell pack might be a byword for worthlessness through the Highlands, as indeed it was; but that was just ill luck. There wasn't a flaw anywhere in the breed of his hound, Bran, that a human could find, and yet

there was Bran back in the valley hanging onto the throat of some worthless hind, while Cavack had gone straight for the horned buck—and such horns!

The grand wind-blown tops of the antlers were laid back on the neck, as the buck dashed uphill, flying for his life. He had thought to turn downhill and take advantage of the descending slope, but Cavack had not let him. The hound was gaining two yards in every three of the race, this way.

"He might as well turn and have done with it," Allan Campbell said.

He wished the deer would turn, for he hated this running. It was all right for that skinny Macrae to be legging it like a hare over the heather, but such exertion drew on his own wind.

"And take bay with Cavack behind him?" Macrae asked. Cavack's master was not even puffing, and you could hear the pride and the scorn in his voice—pride for his dog and scorn for his guest's judgment.

Damn the fellow! He was too cocksure.

"It's a fine beast, that buck, and he's skelping it brawly," put in Duncan, Macrae's body servant, who was at their heels.

"Aye, a fine stag," agreed Macrae.

Allan Campbell said with deliberation:

"I'd liefer have the dog himself than a dozen such bucks."

From Campbell to Macrae that should be as good as from king to subject, but Evan did not hear, or pretended he did not. He was leaping cairns and heather clumps with almost as much ease as Cavack himself. The followers of the chiefs were hurrying after them, deserting the mass slaughter in the valley to be on hand for the final duel between deerhound and deer.

Allan Campbell had often wondered at the fame of the Macrae hunts. He had sought this invitation to Aultnaharra to see its cause for himself. He had despised himself for coming, but he had come. Why should not his hunts be the talk of the Highlands? He knew the answer now. It was Cavack, with his strength, his speed and his silence. Above all his silence.

When they had lain like outlaws this morning between the black seams of the bog, waiting for the scouts to drive the herd over the hill down to the hunters concealed in the valley, Cavack had lain as quiet as the men. Until the eagle screamed. The eagle had been wheeling over the near side of Scronacro and had suddenly fled with a skirl and a silver flash of wet wings into the pale face of the rising sun. Cavack had jumped then, birch-leaf ears cocked. Almost immediately a buck's surroyals had topped Scronacro like two triple crowns. Bran had whined excitedly. But not Cavack. He had strained forward, every sinew showing beneath his blue-gray coat—but he had been silent.

The deer herd had come pouring into the valley. Dogs were choking themselves at their leashes, and men nerv-

ously fingering dirks and guns. Cavack did not move again.

The herd was close, reeking and steaming. An arrow cut the air in a clean curve, and there came a deep bay from some hound's throat. The dogs were slipped, and still Cavack stood quiet.

The deer were running about like a flock of frightened chickens. A buck with a knife in his belly was stampeding in the center. Another with a ball in his throat was struggling on the earth. A hind with a hound dangling below her rearing head was trying to throw off her assailant, plunging this way and that. Cavack stood bristling, his dark eyes searching the shambles.

Then, sure and straight as the arrow—he was off! He jostled everything out of his road, for he had singled out his quarry, the thirteen-tiner he was now pursuing. A ball had crashed into the buck's ribs, and he had broken from the herd, skelping off on thin, twinkling legs. He had thought to finish his run downhill and cross the valley to safety, but Cavack had outmaneuvered him.

The buck, finding his uphill dash did no good, changed to a diagonal course and then to one level along Scronacro's side. The men, still on the up grade, lost full sight of the two at times. Whenever they came to view again, Cavack was always closer. The two were nearing a ridge in the hill, beyond which they must vanish a while. Campbell, whose fatigue was forgotten in his excitement, swore loudly. The dog's muzzle was almost level with the buck's hind hoof. At any minute the deer must turn or be dragged down while running. It would be a sin and a shame not to see all of the finish.

Macrae stopped with a loud curse.

"Another few yards and he'd have overhauled him! Devil take it for a cataract!"

Campbell, stopping, too, heard the roar of tumbling water. He had not

heeded it before. He did not know this country, but Macrae knew that directly over that ridge was a great gash in Scronacro's side, a precipice through which water fell headlong over rock.

Macrae was racing again on the level now, and his face was grim as flint. Campwell saw the buck poised on a stone just over the edge of the ridge, a threatening statue seen for a second against the brightening sky. Then the beast gathered his legs, seemed to sit down, and slipped from sight.

"Devil's in it for a drop, then," thought Campbell.

Not even the tip of a surroyal could be seen.

Macrae was yelling like a lunatic and tearing over Scranacro like a high wind in a narrow pass. The light breeze blew the words back into his mouth:

"Back, Cavack! No, lad!"

But Cavack had leaped after the buck.

It took some minutes for the men to reach the ridge beyond which the cataract boomed, tumbling between high banks. They lay flat on their stomachs, looking over and up.

The buck had landed on a broad stone ledge, in mid-course of the torrent. The upper fall plunged down behind him. The water raced about his legs, throwing a fine spray over the platform on which he stood. Then it rushed over the edge plumb down to the ravine below. Save for the wound in the buck's side, neither animal was the worse for his jump, so far as a man could see. The deer had his rump to the stream head and was advancing on Cavack, who stood, his back to the edge of the platform, baying him defiantly.

If Cavack retreated, he'd be off the ledge and his neck broken. Macrae fingered the flintlock of his long-barreled gun, but then he knew that Cavack had as many twists in his tactics as a hare in his course. He might aim for the deer and hit the dog.

The buck was raking and stabbing

with his antlers, with Cavack dodging him like a boxer. Suddenly Cavack curved about, and was menacing the buck from the side. The deer backed, tossing his mane with an angry snort, and kicked the water into a fine spray. The dog avoided the hoof and sprang, sinking his teeth in the stomach and tearing the skin. A furious bell rose above the noise of water. The buck swerved, reared, struck out with forefeet and horns, sank a tine in the blue-gray coat, ripped it, and dragged Cavack along a few paces.

"Ach! Ach!" Duncan set to wailing; but Macrae clouted him into silence.

There was no sound from the rest of the hunters gathered about the chiefs but the hissing intake or outbreathing of air.

"A-a-ah!" It was a sigh of relief.

Cavack had freed himself, snarling. He drew away toward the overhanging high rock from which he and his quarry had leaped. The buck, alert again, prepared to charge. He came on, head lowered, determined to butt. Cavack retreated slowly, forgetting the wall behind him in his fury. He was against it. In another second he might be pinned to it. At the last instant he slipped, sidling along the rock. A tine struck him above the eye, glanced off the bone, and crashed against the stone.

"A-ow! He's going!" There was no restraining Duncan's chorus, when calamity threatened.

In sidling to safety from the antlers Cavack had reached the edge of the platform. His hind legs were slipping over it, betraying him.

"Hu-up, lad! Hu-up!" Even Macrae himself was now, in his anxiety, making the fight with his dog.

The deer, dazed by meeting rock when he had expected flesh, was mercifully motionless. Cavack scrabbled. He heaved, slipped, heaved again. They could almost hear the scratch of his claws on the stone. He got a bearing

for his hind legs, and hoisted himself to the level. A piercing scream rose from the men, and Campbell roared:

"By God! he's a *hound*!"

Macrae said nothing.

Cavack was making a dash for the back of the platform, stealing the buck's former favorable stance. His back was to the stream head now. He could maneuver with greater freedom. The deer had swerved about to face him. The men could see that Cavack was bristling with rage and excitement. Both animals were tired. The end must be near.

Cavack sprang into the air for the throat, missed, and, brought forward by his own bound, lit right in front of the buck. The brow antler dove an inch into his haunch. He wheeled about, faced the stage, and jumped a second time. The second attack, coming so swiftly, was unexpected. His teeth sank in soft flesh.

The wind-blown tops of the antlers sank slowly toward the water. The buck's body jerked from side to side, as he tried to loose the hold, but he was pulled down steadily, ruthlessly.

When Duncan, lowered by a rope, reached the platform, deer and dog were lying in midstream and Cavack was still clinging to the dead stag's throat. As the man's hand touched his head, caressing it, the dog gave a last perfunctory shake to his limp quarry. Then he was lifted to safety, and lay spent on the earth.

Macrae felt him over with fingers sure and sensitive as a fiddler's. There was nothing much amiss with him, and such as there was Duncan could mend. Macrae turned away to give directions about the buck.

"You'll be passing by here on your way home," he said to Campbell, "so we might as well let the buck lie here."

Campbell nodded a casual assent. What did he care for deer flesh, or even horns? His face was heavy, as he

watched the men deftly lift the buck from the water, gralloch it, clean it, and cover it with peats.

"Ow! what a bowkit beast!" screamed one, as he sprinkled the carcass with gunpowder and hoisted a black flag on the wind-blown antlers, in order to scare the ravens away.

But Campbell's cold eye was on Cavack. Thirty-odd inches, if one, to the haunch. Close on eight stone, if a pound. Black of ear tip, muzzle, and about the eye. Broad of foreleg and elbow and footed like a cat. He touched the flat skull, intending a caress, but Cavack recoiled from him. He thought he had frightened the dog by approaching the wound above the eye. He tried a pat on the crisp hair of the back, but again the dog drew off. There was nothing hostile or offensive in the movement. It was made rather with the dignity of one who, without being rude, wishes to show that familiarity is not welcome.

Irritated, conscious that Macrae was watching, Campbell switched a sudden glance in his direction. He would have welcomed an open quarrel just then. If he could catch a gleam of derision in the other's eye, even, there'd be unspoken cause for enmity between them. But Evan Macrae's long-lashed lids were hiding his eyes. He had a trick of dropping those lids, when he wanted to make his face blank of expression. His eyes were the only features he could not trust not to betray his thoughts, so he set these fringed guards on them.

"Too nervous a dog for my meat."

Campbell tried to be provocative.

But Evan Macrae only said: "Yes?"

And then: "We ought to be making tracks for home."

Was there no way to break through the even temper of Macrae's antagonism? The skinny devil knew well that Allan coveted that hound. He knew, too, that a Campbell never need want for anything a Macrae owned, if it

came to an open fight. But how could Campbell provoke an open fight with his host, when the host happened to be Evan Macrae, the imperturbable?

"Aye, it's *time* we had food," said Campbell, rudely.

He wished he was not going to Aultnaharra for the night, but perhaps it would turn out for the best. There were more ways of getting a dog than by deed of gift or the calling of the clans to arms. A damned stand-offish dog, Cavack was, though. He'd be difficult.

In a sour silence the chiefs started homeward, followers and hounds forming a noisy procession behind them. Cavack fell into step beside his master, with twisted Duncan trailing close by. Campbell noisily summoned Bran to him, but could not keep him at heel. He was forever darting off after some hare they'd start, while Cavack, unapproachable and polite as his owner, walked quietly.

There was no good talking. You could not keep your eyes off Cavack, stand-offish or not. He was dainty and light-footed as a lady, stepping from moss hag to moss hag. There was that proud stride of his, too, and the graceful lift of his loins and his powerful hindquarters. He was the only dog worth having in the Highlands.

"You should have it fine, going home to-morrow," Evan Macrae said.

He was studying a west that was the color of jade splashed here and there with blood. He was remarking that the shade of the hills in this light reminded him of the bloom you see on great, purple grapes.

Grapes! What in hell did a Macrae know about grapes? So Allan thought. And he said that the scattered firs on the slopes looked to him like bristles on a chin that needed shaving. He meant to be bitter, to show Macrae that his talk was crazy talk, unfit for hunters.

To his angry surprise Macrae looked at him with a new interest.

"Well, isn't that the truth? So they do," he said.

His guest felt more baffled than ever.

They lost the western glow in a fir wood so deep that the light could only filter through thinly. This was the beginning of the Aultnaharra ground, and Campbell wished he was entering Carrigard. He was low in his mind, but he was also hungry, and Carrigard was many good miles off. The wood was dank and growing darker. Silence had fallen on the squabbling, singing crew behind. Coming home from a hunt at Carrigard, they'd be all bellowing, Allan with the best. Macrae was enough to kill the song in any man, with his clipped voice and smile all to one side.

A skirl of pipes brought the wood to shrill life, and the smoky flare of torches reddened a trunk here and there.

"We're home," said Macrae. "Welcome to you and yours, Allan Campbell."

The pine torches were being held aloft by six huge Highlanders on either side the great gate of the Macrae home-stead. Every Highlander was in full dress, a drawn sword point downward in his right hand and the light in his left.

Macrae recognized the right of a Campbell, then, to be welcomed with ceremony. Allan knew himself for what he was, a fine figure of a man, and he drew that figure erect to display it rightly. He passed between the guard of honor with a swing of his kilts from strong, square hips. He held his handsome head high as a king's on the thick column of his neck.

There was music and fire all about him, as was fitting. He glanced around, and missed nothing of the musketry loopholes in the outer walls, none too many, nor of the scaffolding for firearms against the inner walls, none too well supplied. He saw the couple of

guns mounted on convenient turrets, and thought of the arsenal at Carrigard. Carrigard with its sixty-foot foundation of rock and winding defense of river and guns of the newest type—and as numerous as you wanted.

He smiled.

The Macrae servants were bowing in his honor. The pipes were playing him over the threshold of the dwelling house. He saw the dark, vaulted vestibule with its sole furnishing of a twopenny ale barrel and a few dozen bickers. He passed by this free refreshment and followed his host into the inner room with its low-swung arched roof. A huge fire of peat mixed with bog-deal threw distorted shadows of himself and others on the ceiling. It dimmed the candles in their tin sconces along the walls. No gleam of silver or gold here, no rich rugs. Just the paraphernalia of the hunter and fighter.

Campbell stood with his back to the fire. He had known that Macrae was poor, but he was poorer even than report made him. Cavack came quietly in, and, seeing the stranger on the hearth, avoided it. Campbell thought of the feast he might set in Carrigard after such a hunt as to-day's. He saw himself with Cavack beside him presiding, twin heroes.

"Here, lad!" He beckoned the dog to him.

Cavack did not come.

"Will you not sit and eat?" Macrae invited him.

Servants were loading up the great table. He sat at the head beside Macrae, and the rest took their places in the order of their importance. Venison roast and sodden, partridge and grouse fresh from the moors, salmon just out of the stream, mutton and beet, claret from France, whisky, ale with a body to it, fine brandy. If the furnishings were poor, there was no fault to find with the food.

"Your health, Allan Campbell!"

"Health without hardship to you, Evan Macrae!"

Campbell drank and felt the glow in his empty stomach. He ate and drank more. Cavack was stretched before the fire now, blue-silver in the wavering light. Macrae threw scraps of meat to him, and he ate on the warm hearthstone. Campbell offered a well-covered bone, and the dog came for it, allowing himself to be patted. The hound was friendly enough. He had been cold and exhausted, out there on the hillside.

So had Campbell himself, for that matter. He was neither now. He was comfortable and confident. He expanded, chanting genially:

"With eye of sloe, with ear not low,  
With horse's breast and depth of chest,  
With breadth of loin and curve in groin,  
With nape set far behind the head,  
Such were the dogs that Fingal bred."

Macrae matched him with a quotation:

"The hind leg like a hook or bent bow,  
The breast like a garrow,  
The ear like a leaf."

"And you've got it all in Cavack, Evan Macrae," said Campbell.

"He's a faithful dog," the other replied.

"Faithful?" Campbell's bellow and heaving shoulders rejected the adjective. "A hound is faithful to the man that feeds him."

"Is that all, Cavack, lad?"

Macrae, mellower at his own board than he had been on the mountain, bent back to address the dog. The lean head was lifted lazily from the stone, turned in his master's direction a second. Then Cavack stretched, yawning luxuriously with wide jaws. Allan Campbell laughed, suddenly uproarious. He slapped his thigh, and all looked at him expectantly, hoping to share the joke in his mind. But all he said was:

"Where's Bran? Fetch me Bran, Ranald."

Ranald, Campbell's own body servant, close now behind his seat, went out silently. He was a thick-bodied man with an assured, contemptuous eye. He had the air of holding himself aloof from his fellows, but you knew that nothing they said or did escaped him. He returned as quietly as he had gone, leading Bran. Campbell fondled his hound, fed him, and kept a hand on his neck. It was evident that he valued him highly.

The retainers of the two chiefs were retiring, leaving them to converse in peace. Only Campbell and Macrae sat at table, each with his servant close by. Campbell set the talk on Carrigard. He must have a hunt soon, and Evan Macrae must come.

"We haven't a Cavack in our pack, Evan Macrae; but you can't have everything. 'Twould be a great thing now to have Cavack, wouldn't it, Ranald?"

He leaned back, so that his eye could meet that of his servant. Ranald said nothing.

"Bran's a good dog," said Macrae, in a pause.

"He might be worse." Campbell was pulling the dog's ear, thoughtfully. There were more ways of getting what you wanted than by deed of gift or an open fight.

He took a draft of brandy, pledging his host.

"You've not been to Carrigard, Evan Macrae? What's the quickest road now, Ranald, for a man to travel to Carrigard?"

Ranald began to speak very slowly, and Evan Macrae listened. Once he looked sidewise from under his lashes at his guest. Allan Campbell was staring straight before him. His heavy, handsome head was motionless on its red neck. But his ears seemed to Macrae very attentive. Macrae listened again—listened like a man trying to

detect an overtone to a simple musical note.

"He could follow the bed of the Bodach through the strath," Ranald was saying, "and keep close to it for a piece in the woods. He would come to Drumsnab, and he could round that to the south. An he found the right path, he would happen on a crag facing west, where he could shelter from any storm that might overtake him. Then he could take the path——"

Allan Campbell's head jerked back, and he roared:

"What's come to the man with his talk of storms and crags? Evan Macrae won't come afoot to Carrigard, and who but a fool would follow the Bodach on horseback?"

He was looking up at his servant, and Evan Macrae saw a twist that might be a smile on Ranald's thin lips and a glint in his eyes like that of a cheerless sun on a sullen day.

"I'll tell Evan Macrae the road myself." Allan loosed his hold on Bran's head. "There, go warm your bones by the fire."

The dog walked off to the hearth, and at his approach Cavack rose on his forepaws. He had the air of one unable to believe that intrusion is really intended. Bran came on, sniffing tentatively, and Cavack stood on all fours. He growled. They were close, almost touching, noses on. Cavack growled again, more ominously, and Bran answered. You could see Cavack's white teeth now grinning in his head. He was snarling and setting up his bristles. They faced one another with teeth bared and muzzles outthrust.

"Here, Cavack! Quiet, lad!"

Macrae went to them. In another second the dogs would have been at each other's throats.

"Take him away, Duncan, and stay you with him," he ordered.

He had caught Cavack by the scruff of the neck, and Campbell's hand was

on Bran. The guest was exchanging a glance with his servant, who inclined his head, unnoticed by the others.

"Even after such a day he's ready to fight," Campbell was saying. "A great dog, Evan Macrae, you have in Cavack. Ach, man, don't apologize for him. But I'm loath to let him go on such a night—or Duncan, either. Go you with him, Ranald. Evan Macrae and I can look to ourselves."

He made no offer to dismiss Bran, whom he was still holding.

"Send John Dhu to wait on us," said Macrae quietly to Duncan. "There's no call for your man to go," he said to Campbell.

"Ach, he'll fare better in Duncan's company, I've no doubt." But Ranald was going, just the same.

"Keep Cavack by you," Macrae ordered Duncan again. His lids were veiling his eyes, and he spoke with quiet insistence.

"I'll tak' tent of him," replied Duncan sourly, as he seized Cavack by the neck.

"To your quick visit to Carrigard!" Campbell raised his cup, as the two were left alone at table.

Evan Macrae drank, and his gray-green eyes were studying the other intently. He noted the smile curling the full, red lips and broadening the heavy, lined face.

"You'll be tired, after the day, and wanting to retire, maybe," Evan said.

Campbell protested that he was rarely tired, and never, in good company. There were many things men like themselves might discuss with profit these days. Times were troubrous, and gentlemen with common interests should know one another's minds and needs, in case of danger. He turned the talk to politics, to the doings of the estates and the increasing lawlessness of the clans disaffected in consequence of those doings. Where did the Macraes stand?

"My people are few and peaceable," said Evan Macrae. "We fight only when we must."

"All the more reason to be sure of stout friends," Campbell returned.

Macrae smiled. Was Campbell threatening or promising?

The conversation was like a stream that some one is trying to dam. It jumped from this to that and had no direction in it.

"You'll be ready to retire now, maybe?" asked Macrae again.

"No, nor likely to be for long."

Campbell spoke impatiently, but he was full of purpose. It was hours later when he rose of his own accord. Macrae escorted him to a room, where a four-post bed with tartan curtains awaited him. There was no sign of Ranald. Campbell said he was no doubt with the rest out in the courtyard, where the pipes could be heard screaming a dance tune for the tireless.

"Let the man have his fling. I need no help to sleep."

Macrae went to his own quarters, and saw that, though the heather in Duncan's crib had been crumpled, there was no sign of the servant himself. The master sought him among the crowd, and learned that Ranald had been calling for him, and that the two, with Cavack, had gone off somewhere. If Duncan was with the dog, thought the master, he was all right.

Macrae, tired, fell asleep. But his uneasy mind woke him early. Duncan's crib was still empty, though gray-white dawn was chilling the room. The chief dressed quickly and made a round of the dwelling and offices. Campbell servants were astir, tending the horses that would carry them home. Macrae domestics were busy, too, but none could give word of Duncan. The master was still questioning those who might have seen him or Ranald, when Campbell appeared in person.

"Your ale flows too freely, Evan

Macrae," said he, apprised of the disappearance. "They're both snoring soundly, with Cavack on guard. Well, Ranald can find his way home alone, if he does not wake soon."

"He knows it by many roads, if he tells rightly." Macrae was bitter.

But Campbell was pretending an interest in the preparations for departure, and Evan Macrae could only say that breakfast would be ready as soon as the men were. It was a brief meal eaten in a broken silence, Campbell's joviality was as hollow and noisy as water thrown by the bucketful against a rock—the rock of Macrae's reserve.

"To your quick arrival in Carrigard, Evan Macrae!"

"I may be there before you look for me, Allan Campbell."

He was guarding neither his eyes nor his tongue now. Campbell laughed in his face.

At the end of the table was an uneasy whisper. Campbell and Macrae retainers were measuring one another. They might be doing it soon, they felt, with weapons in their hands; but until their chiefs gave the word, they could do no more than exchange glances.

The Campbells, departed with a clatter of hoofs and a great yelling of ironic invitations. The gate swung behind them, and Macrae assembled his men. He did not tell them how he had learned the truth, but he was sure it was the truth now. Cavack had been stolen. The one comfort was that Duncan was with him somewhere.

"Duncan with luck will delay the journey and give us a chance to recover the dog before he's inside the stronghold of Carrigard. Once there—"

A despairing "Ach!" finished his sentence for him. Only one man lifted his voice against the finality of Cavack's fate, if the Campbells could get him inside Carrigard.

"There's other homes besides Aultnahrarra would be glad to avenge the day

that Allan Campbell entered them as guest."

No one heeded him. Where were the clans could tackle the Campbells and their allies? Evan Macrae went on:

"Some of you will follow the Campbells to Scronacro and see whether any of them break off from the main party. If they do, you must follow them, but you must not be seen." And he repeated this last injunction.

"Others of us will follow the Bodach," he went on, "round Drumsnab to the south and seek a path that leads to a crag facing west."

Wasn't it lucky he had listened so carefully to Ranald's recitation last night?

He picked the men now for the different tasks; and four, headed by himself, were soon riding toward the strath bordering the Bodach. The gray mist was silver-white in patches. It moved sluggishly over the treetops, trailing ragged little trains. You could see the ribs of some mountains in the distance. It would be a fine day, when the sun showed its strength. The earth was moist beneath them, though, and the horses did not like it. It made the going slow, and they were glad when they reached the woods. The men had to leave their mounts here, for the ground inside was broken and boggy, and there was no path.

It was not easy, cumbered with weapons, to clamber through overhanging boughs and projecting roots, through thickets of thorn and bramble and over rocks that shot you into ravines. They cursed a stream as they leaped it, and no one laughed when a man landed on his back in the water. Evan Macrae was as sure-footed, cruel and intent as a wild cat on the track of an enemy. He was ready to fight with tooth and claw, if need be, for there was no mercy in him anywhere. He was dangerous in this mood, and they did not disturb him.

Drumsnab rose before them across a clearing which they took at a run. The farther they traveled, the more they felt the urge of the chase. Drumsnab was like a cup upside down with a solid handle sticking out of it to the south. They had to cut through the handle, but they met no path, and a meadow stretching before them told them they were out of their road. They did not dare go into the open to reconnoiter. They pushed back through underbrush instead. It was thick on the west side of Drumsnab, tangled about the roots of ancient birches and oaks and mountain ash. Boulders sticking up here and there were a nuisance to them.

Evan Macrae halted them with uplifted hand, and let out the familiar whistle of his clan. It was like the note of a whimbrel, soft, complaining, and it was meant to tell those who heard it that a Macrae was in trouble. His followers looked at him in astonishment. Did he want, then, to betray their presence? He gave the note again, more loudly, and was answered. Cavack bayed in the distance.

"Cavack's fair lepping with excitement," muttered Angus. You could easily recognize the wildness of that voice.

"They're over our heads to the north and not much more than a few hundred yards off," Macrae said; and the light that had leaped to his eyes at the sound of Cavack's note was still shining there.

In their upward climb they came on a narrow, irregular path, ribbed with tree roots. They were on the right road. Macrae told his men to keep well in the shadow of the trees and some paces behind him. If he waved to them, they were to halt at once, and stay there until given further orders.

A high crag, flat of face, rose before them. Macrae waved. The men stopped, and he advanced alone. He could

see where a staircase had been made on the near side of the crag with nicks in the stone and low boughs for steps. He could see Cavack straining forward on the top of the crag and Duncan holding him by a rope around the neck.

"Back, Evan Macrae!" yelled Duncan.

Macrae halted and put a tree trunk between him and the crag for protection. Peering around it, he now saw Ranald standing behind Duncan and the dog, using them as a rampart. He had his gun leveled on Cavack's head, and, without deflecting his gaze from it, he spoke.

"If your man so much as slackens his hold, Evan Macrae, your dog is done, and Duncan after him. You'd best go back the way you came, or you'll find yourself in trouble."

A great hallooing was audible from the bottom of Drumsnab on the side opposite to that by which the Macraes had arrived. The Campbells were coming. How many of them were there and how good had the Macrae scouts been in tracking them? There was nothing to be gained by waiting to see.

"Here, Angus! The rest of you keep cover," Macrae called.

Angus came running.

"Up the rock there, on the side, and shoot that Campbell dog stealer," he was ordered.

"I'll kill the hound, if he moves a step," threatened Ranald.

"And much good a dead hound will do Allan Campbell," tauntingly jeered Evan Macrae.

Every one knew what Allan Campbell might do to a servant failing him in a set task. Ranald was in a fix, and he showed it by yelling to the approaching Campbells. Their answering voices were perilously close. If only Angus now could make the crag top quickly! He had tripped, fallen and regained his feet. Despairing of reaching the top, he was climbing an ash, from the upper

branches of which he could train his gun on Ranald. Duncan was bending low over Cavack, who was standing erect, silent, taut. Ranald shouted to Duncan to stand back, for the man's body was protecting the hound's head. Duncan only jeered at him.

"Allan Campbell!" A cry of delight broke from Ranald.

His chief had appeared running up the path on the opposite side, followed by his men some paces behind him. A gun roared, and Ranald dropped with a groan. Campbell was standing directly before the crag, confused. Macrae, unseen, was taunting him.

"I'd no call to go to Carrigard, Allan Campbell. I found what I wanted here."

Campbell swung about to face the sound. He could not see what was happening on the crag over his head. His men called to him, but they called to him too late.

A silver-gray form slid down through the air. Cavack struck the earth near him, and at once sprang for his throat. The first bound knocked Campbell flat on his back, and then the hound was astride him, snarling, teeth bared, muzzle thrust forward. Campbell roared in panic, but Macrae was already reaching for the rope about his dog's neck and talking to him.

"Steady, lad!" he was saying. "Steady!"

The dog's look was ugly still, but he was obedient. An arrow whizzed overhead. A Campbell retainer had thought to put a ball in Cavack's brain, but the gun was brought from his hand by the arrow's stab in his wrist. The rest of the Campbells were quiet, for they could not see whence that arrow had come. And now Macrae was addressing them.

"I'll loose the dog, if you as much as cock a gun," he said; "and you'll go home carrying your chief's corpse."

Campbell's men had seen Cavack

fight, and they had no wish to take up a challenge with him.

"What's your will, Allan Campbell?" one asked.

Cavack was snarling again and showing impatience with Macrae's dilatory attitude.

"Take the dog off me," Campbell cried to Macrae.

"Tell your men to go."

Campbell's mouth opened, but only curses came. He squirmed on the earth, but a movement from the hound quieted him. Evan Macrae was watching him, eyes unshaded now, and there was neither mercy nor admiration in his steady gaze.

"Do as you're bid," called Allan Campbell to his men at last.

"And if you don't come home safe after us?"

"You've my word that he will," said Evan Macrae; "and you'd best take it, I think."

And then he cocked an ear to listen. A soft, complaining note like that of a whimbrel could be heard deep down in the wood. Macrae answered it. The men he had detached to watch the Campbells were coming.

"When the Macraes that have been following you from Scronacro return safe here and report you well on your way, Allan Campbell will be free to follow you," Macrae announced.

The Campbells were turning to go, but Macrae detained them.

"You can wait for them to escort you. And perhaps you'd like to take home your dead."

He pointed to the crag, whereon the body of Ranald lay. While they climbed up and carried down the corpse, Allan Campbell lay on the earth, with Cavack astride him and Macrae standing by. Whenever Campbell moved, the dog moved too, and the sharp teeth shone in his head. Cavack was aching to sink those sharp teeth in Campbell's flesh.

The Campbells moved off, their chief still on his back. It was an hour or more before the Macrae men returned with the news that the Campbells were well on their way. And all the time Evan had stood there, only his voice and hand protecting Allan from certain death.

"You can go now," Macrae said; and hauled the reluctant hound away.

Campbell rose. His nostrils were quivering with rage, but he did not dare make even a menacing gesture. The hound was watching him, alert and silent as he had been that morning when he stood watching the herd.

"I'll come again, Evan Macrae," Campbell said, as he turned to go.

"And welcome, Allan Campbell—but not to Cavack!"

*Watch for more stories by Meade Corcoran.*



### DISCIPLINE ON THE DIAMOND

JUDGE WILLIAM G. BRAMHAM, one of the leading Republican politicians of the South, is also a baseball mogul three times over, being president of the South Atlantic Association, a Class B organization; the Piedmont League, Class C; and the Eastern Carolina League, Class D. One of his pet policies is that the players shall under all circumstances respect the umpires, and when a hot-headed performer on the diamond breaks the rule, Bramham invariably claps on him the fine recommended by the offended arbiter.

A player in one of his leagues, who had been fined ten dollars several times for using abusive language to umpires, was warned by the president that if he did it again he would not get off so lightly. Soon after that an umpire called a play against this Hotspur, who rushed across the diamond and, pointing his finger in the official's face, said through his clenched teeth: "This is wonderful weather we're having! I sat on my front porch last night, and what do you think I saw? Beautiful stars! I never saw so many beautiful stars! What do you think of that? Moreover, it's not going to rain, anyway. No! No more bad weather!"

While he was saying that, he gesticulated like a madman, bobbing his head, kicking up dust and waving his hand under the umpire's nose. To the spectators, who could not hear what he was saying, he seemed to be consumed by rage and on the point of letting the arbiter have a punch on the chin any moment. When the game was over, the crowd tried to assault the umpire.

The offender, who was fined \$75, appealed to Bramham to make the penalty smaller. The judge refused.

"But," objected the player, "why make it so stiff, Judge Bramham? I didn't abuse that umpire. I didn't say one word about the play or the game. Why're you fining me?"

"I'm fining you," replied Bramham, "for practicing astronomy on the diamond, where you should confine your activities to playing baseball!"



# Chester

MILD *enough for anybody*



## What a cigarette meant there

*Down from a starless sky . . . and after hours of utter strain, a moment of utter relaxation. Safety after peril . . . rest after struggle . . . companionship after lonely vigil . . . no wonder the solace of a friendly cigarette has a place of its own in men's hearts.*

## What a cigarette means here

*Up from the sun-drenched earth—drowsily nourished under smiling skies, the tender leaves of tobacco ripen into gold or bronze.*

From what soil and rain and summer sun prepare, we select the prize lots. Aroma and fragrance from Turkey; from old Virginia and the Carolinas, rare mildness; mellow "body" from Kentucky. We "age" it and blend it . . . and from earth's choicest tobaccos we give you Chesterfield.

And about six million smokers tell us it's more than worth all the trouble we take!

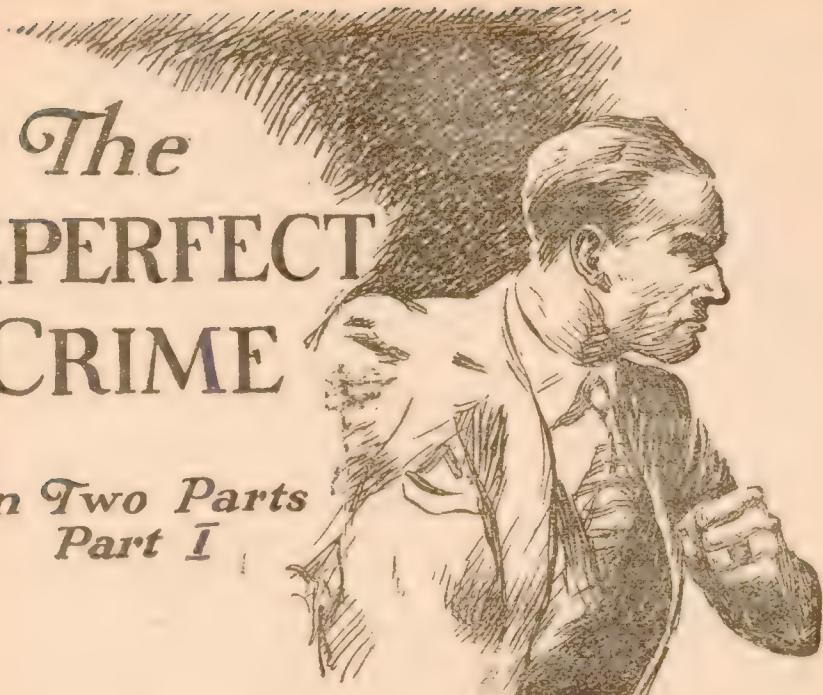
*Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.*



*Harvesting "bright"  
tobacco and hauling  
to the curing barn.*

# field

.... and yet THEY SATISFY



# *The* IMPERFECT CRIME

*In Two Parts  
Part I*

## CHAPTER I.

### THE TWO JOES.

CASKEY, a hard-boiled skeptic in most things, had never believed the old saying that every man has his double until the evening he found himself in the subway sitting near him. This gag of having two people look alike had been the stand-by of writers from time immemorial, but for it actually to happen in real life? Apple sauce!

And now the thing had actually happened. Not merely that; it now seemed that in New York's teeming millions it should have happened long ago. Considering the population of the world, the only amazing thing was that doubles were the rare exception instead of the rule. Where had this one been keeping himself all the time?

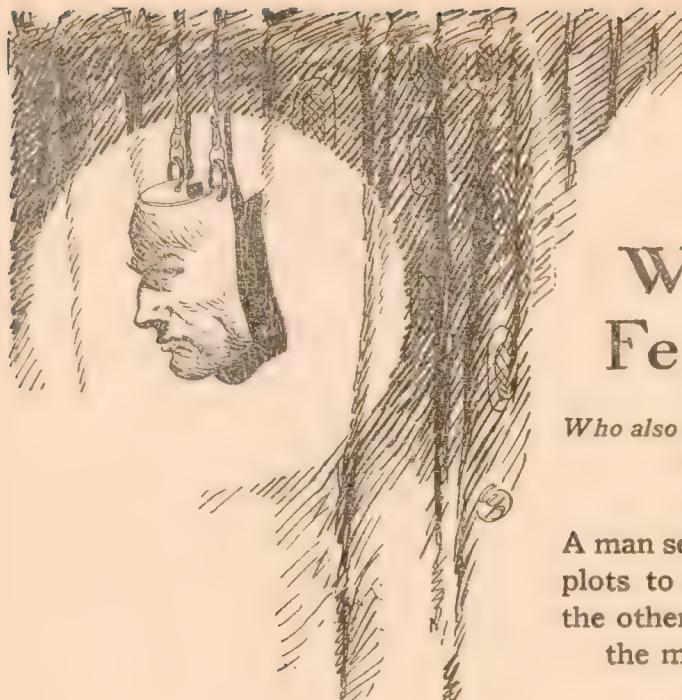
Yes, this fellow sitting across the aisle, absorbed in a pretty girl, might have been Joe Caskey, if Caskey had been born with money instead of brains.

This fellow was obviously rich. Caskey himself was a very neat dresser, within his limited means, but this other fellow's clothes were the real thing.

Yes, he was rich, he had no worries, and he was happily married. That girl he was talking to was his wife, as her wedding ring showed. Newlyweds, oblivious to all but themselves, to everything but their own apparent happiness. They had been to a show and a supper, as scraps of their dialogue testified, while he, Caskey, had been slaving as usual until nearly midnight.

"That's what I ought to be," thought Caskey, "if only I'd got a fair break from life. I ought to have a wife like that, money and position. It beats the devil how some fellows have everything, others nothing. And it's generally the most deserving ones who have nothing."

He was startled to overhear the girl address her companion as "Joe." So this fellow was not only a ringer for



By

## W. B. M. Ferguson

*Who also wrote "The Crimson Rambler."*

A man sees his double, and plots to don the mask of the other's identity. Then the mystery begins!

him but had the same Christian name! This unprecedented behavior of coincidence, at which he had always scoffed, started Caskey on another train of thought. He felt mildly and pleasantly excited as though romance, of which he had read so much and experienced so little, had actually touched his drab life. Instead of mentally glowering and sneering at this more fortunate alter ego opposite, he began to imagine what he should do if he were the other. The couple gave him no attention; they were evidently unaware that he was anybody's double. People only see clothes and clothes make all the difference in the world.

"That little dame would throw a fit if any one said I was a ringer for her husband," thought Caskey amusedly. "Yes, and so would he. We all think we look like somebody else. But if I was dolled up like him, if I was in that Joe's shoes——"

How wonderful it would be for most

of us if only we could step into some one else's shoes! For none of us is wholly satisfied with his own; they pinch somewhere and there is always another and unattainable pair more desirable, more fashionable or comfortable. If we could only get that other pair, how happy and contented we should be!

"But I wouldn't take up his life, no matter how soft it is," thought Caskey. "You might fool everybody else but not his wife. It goes in novels but it would never work in real life. No, nix on the little dame. I'd simply use his coin, grab all I could and light out, change my name and live on easy street. No, you couldn't fool the wife; every one else, if you like, but not her. Story-book bunk wouldn't go."

Caskey's train of thought became derailed at this point. Why, if he actually was in this other Joe's shoes, there would be no need to try and fool anybody, for he should *be* the other Joe.

Here he had been thinking and planning as though dealing with concrete fact instead of an imaginary metamorphosis, as though this other Joe were a material obstacle that must be removed—in others words, murder and imposture.

Caskey smiled as, suddenly aware that his station being called, he bolted down the car and out the door. Murder, imposture; they had very nearly made him miss his station. Well, there was no accounting for what popped into one's head, and perhaps he was not the only person who pictured himself occasionally as the author of a perfect crime.

If asked, Caskey would have said in all sincerity that he had left even the memory of the unusual incident behind him in the subway; yet as he walked home the picture of the prosperous and happy young couple arose before his mind's eye.

That other Joe would not be going to a lonely rooming house, but to a luxurious apartment somewhere near the Drive. Now if only he had his money as well as looks— So the thought reappeared, seemed to walk, an invisible presence, at his side.

A perfect crime, yes. Nearly everybody thinks he can commit one, and nearly everybody is wrong. But he, Joe Caskey, *knew* he could. That was the difference between himself and other people; he *knew*. He was the exception that proved the rule. It was simply a matter of brains, and average people have very little.

Or else, after the most careful planning, they lose their nerve at the crucial moment and make an egregious blunder. There was always a loose thread somewhere for the alert eye of the law to spot. But Caskey knew he was capable of leaving no loose threads. Now supposing he was acquainted with this other Joe, knew all about him—

"Why," thought Caskey, "the fact

that our first names are even the same would be a great help. Many a clever impostor has given the show away when somebody suddenly called him by his right name. You can't always be on your guard against a thing like that. But my name is really Joe."

Yes, away with a new name and all the coin he could grab. Give the wife a wide berth and cash in on all the negotiable securities. Joe Caskey would be dead and this other Joe would be another fickle husband. The deserted young bride could never find him. Oh, given any kind of luck, the thing could be done.

"The devil it could," scoffed Caskey as he brought out his latchkey. "What am I thinking about, anyway? Why, I'll never even see the fellow again, not in a thousand years. As for killing a man in cold blood, a perfect stranger —" He laughed amusedly.

But Caskey saw his double again, not only saw him but met him. Coincidence, as though aware of his attitude toward it, seemed determined to prove what it could do in real life once it got properly started. But Caskey felt as though a curious fatality were at work; this double of his had been in existence for over twenty-five years, yet he had never known it until the other night. And now he had seen him twice within a week.

Yet there was really nothing remarkable about their meeting; Caskey sold automobiles, and all that goes with them, and Bowker—such, it transpired, was the other Joe's name—had a small car at home that needed some tools. Caskey managed a small place near Fifty-ninth Street which kept open until midnight, and what might be considered as the only coincidence in the matter, was the fact that Bowker happened to be in the neighborhood when he thought of the implements he required. In fact, it was sight of the shop that jogged his easy-going memory.

The hour was late, the last helper had gone home, and Caskey and Bowker were alone. And Bowker did a lot of talking over his purchase, principally about himself. He seemed to be the communicative type, and so happy and prosperous that he wanted to tell the world about it. A good-humored, open-hearted, simple-minded sort of fellow—"like what I ought to be if I'd had any luck," thought Caskey.

This was the beginning of their acquaintance, for it developed that Bowker was in the market for an expensive car for which Caskey's employer was the agent. He wanted a model not in stock, and Caskey could not escape the impression that Bowker, out of the goodness of his heart, wanted to throw the commission his way. Of course, a car more or less would not matter to such a rich fellow, but obviously Bowker could have bought it somewhere else.

Caskey, whose position spoke for itself, felt that the other was sorry for him. Bowker might just as well have said:

"You've got brains, Caskey and you shouldn't be working in a one-horse place like this or for such a man as Sol Rosenbloom. You've the intelligence and education for far better things if only life would give you a fair break. You've had no luck. I've taken a liking to you, as any discerning person would, and I want to give you a lift."

Bowker might just as well have said that, but he did not. What he actually said was:

"I was going to get that model anyway, Caskey, and I might as well get it here. No thanks at all. You aren't indebted to me for anything." Bowker, if simple minded and ingenuous, had brains of a sort, too, as well as tact. He could size up a fellow, estimate his true worth, see that he wasn't the kind to be patronized.

The funny part of it was that ap-

parently Bowker never knew that Caskey had seen him before. And he was entirely oblivious to their physical resemblance—otherwise, of course, he would have said something about it.

"Blind as an owl that way," thought Caskey. "But how many people really know what they look like? Of course, he wouldn't thank me for telling him. He'd get sore."

But was that the real reason he restrained from making some comment to Bowker about their remarkable physical similarity? Caskey assured himself that it was. Yet why not speak of it to some one else?

"What for?" demanded Caskey of the inner voice that had asked the question, the inner voice that was generally bothering him. "Why should I speak of it? Nobody else knows about it. It isn't my fault if Bowker only comes at night when nobody's around. I didn't ask him to."

No, he had not asked him to; their meetings at such an hour had come about quite naturally, as naturally as their first meeting. It was another one of those things, like Bowker's friendliness and talkativeness, that seemed to be urging Caskey along a road he had thought irrevocably closed. Bowker dropped in late at night, when he came at all, because it was a time when both Caskey and he were free.

But that was not all; Bowker wished the car as a surprise birthday gift for his wife, and he did not want the news to get to her through some inquisitive friend. That was why, he explained, he had chosen a strange agent. Caskey, on his part, did not want his employer to know about the sale until it was an accomplished fact.

"Old Rosenbloom would try to cut me out of my full commission," he said to Bowker. "Yes, he's done it before, grabbed a prospect I'd got and then claimed that he was the one who sold him. This model was on order any-

way, but the boss isn't going to know it's sold until I tell him." Thus these clandestine meetings, suiting both men, had come about quite naturally.

Caskey could also explain quite satisfactorily to his conscience how he had come to know Bowker's bank and signature; but what he could not explain with equal logic was why he should begin to imitate that signature. Not that he attempted no explanation.

"I'm only trying it for fun," he assured that bothersome inner voice. "I only want to see if I'm as handy with the pen as I used to be. No harm in that, is there? Of course, I'd never think of trying to use it."

No, certainly not; the idea of him ever trying to palm himself off as Bowker was absurd, yet not so absurd as once it had been. No, not by a long shot.

"I mean," thought Caskey, "the idea of me ever doing such a thing is absurd. It's not that I *couldn't* but that I *wouldn't*. No, and I really couldn't either. There's his wife; she's be onto me sure before I could cash in and make a get-away. No, I couldn't fool the wife. It would be real life, not a storybook, and something would tell her I wasn't the right Joe. Yes, she's a stopper. It isn't as if Bowker was in the habit of going off for a day or so, or as if they weren't dead stuck on each other like newlyweds. I'd have to turn up on the nail, wouldn't have a chance of cashing in without first meeting her. I'd need a few days at least to find out all he's got. So it couldn't be done, you see, and that's that. Not that I'd ever dream of trying it, of course."

And then Bowker announced that his wife had gone to Buffalo on a visit to her mother.

"Won't be back for a week or ten days, Caskey, and I want to meet her with that car when she returns. It'll be her birthday then. When the Harry do you expect it?"

"To-morrow," replied Caskey, and his voice sounded dry. "We got a wire to-day and she's been shipped. It took a little extra time for those gadgets you wanted but, if you like, you can have your first spin in her to-morrow night sure."

"Right-o," said Bowker. "We'll give her a good buzz over in Jersey and have some eats at a road house. You'll come along, of course?"

"Sure," said Caskey, his voice still dry.

They would be alone and nobody would ever know they had been together. Nobody would be at the store when Bowker arrived, nobody but himself, Caskey; and nobody in the neighborhood, where motors passed all night, would give them the slightest attention. And Bowker's wife was away for at least a week! The insurmountable obstacle had removed itself and the road lay wide open.

The perfect crime, which he had been pondering subconsciously day after day, leaped full and complete into Caskey's mind. Every detail seemed to appear automatically.

"Not that I'd dream of doing it," he thought, as he went homeward that night. "But how easy it could be done! Why, everything has conspired to make it a dead cinch without me moving a finger!"

He felt a virtuous resentment against this conspiracy of circumstance, against even Bowker himself, as though they were trying to force him along a road he had declined to travel. This was the way some men became criminals; circumstance, in one shape or another, forced them into it willy-nilly, and then the world said they had deliberately planned the whole thing.

"And I haven't lifted a finger," he repeated defensively to the stars. "No, not a finger."

Caskey could not be called a religious man in any sense; it was years and

years since he had been inside a church, and he had almost forgotten any prayer he had ever learned. But now one supplication in the greatest and most simple prayer of all time flashed into his mind, assuming a new significance. "Lead us not into temptation—"

Yes, that was it. Life, which had bullied him from the first, was now trying to tempt him into committing the unforgivable crime, and Bowker was the unconscious instrument. Life would wrest from him, if it could, the last thing he had.

"What about the people who make crime inevitable by putting temptation in a fellow's way?" demanded Caskey of the stars. "They're the ones who're really to blame. Doesn't matter if they don't mean it. It would serve Joe Bowker darned well right if I did bump him off. It's mighty lucky for him that murder isn't in my line."

No, he had never done murder and he never would. Above all, he could never kill in cold blood a fellow being who had been so kind to him. No, preposterous! Of course he would go with Bowker to-morrow night because he must. It was his business to try out a car if a client asked. Yes, he would go, but he wouldn't be forced by anybody or anything into crossing a line he had sworn never to cross.

He would show this unjust fate that had ruled his life that too much was enough. It couldn't drive him any farther, no matter how it tempted, coaxed or bullied. No, not an inch. Henceforth he would be the master of circumstances, not the slave, let things break as they liked.

"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Caskey repeated the words mentally as he left the subway and began the westward walk to his rooming house. He felt suddenly at peace, refreshingly sure of himself as though buoyed up and sustained by some invisible exterior power. He even felt

happy, less morose and embittered, less spiritually isolated. He had not felt so happy for a long time. The fight was over and he had won—not that he had ever really seriously contemplated such a crime. No, nothing and nobody could tempt him to such a foul deed.

"Hey, Murgatroyd!"

Had it been daylight a close observer would have seen Caskey pause for a fractional second in his stride, would have noticed a convulsive tremor shoot through him. But Caskey walked on, did not turn his head, and a robust man who, a moment before, had passed him under a street lamp turned full round and followed. Caskey did not quicken his step and the somewhat corpulent figure overtook him, seized him by the arm.

"Hello, Murgatroyd!" exclaimed the other. "What are you doing in the Big Town? I haven't seen you for a dog's age."

Caskey looked stonily into the shrewd blue eyes under the slouch hat, noted the clipped graying mustache and every detail of the man's face, figure, and dress.

"Your mistake, brother," he said laconically. "I don't know you."

"What!" The robust man peered at him. "Aren't you Joe Murgatroyd of Rocksburg? Of course you are. I'd know you even if you haven't got a mustache now. I'm Dan Cluer. Remember 'Fatty' Cluer who used to visit your house? Sure you do."

"Sure I do—not. I never was in Rocksburg, wherever that is. Try your con game on some other fish, brother; I'm not biting to-night." And Caskey turned on his heel while the robust man, mouth slightly agape, stood scratching his prominent chin.

Caskey did not quicken his step, not until he was around a near-by corner. Then, like a moving shadow, he flicked into a dark doorway. He had not long to wait; the robust man appeared,

passed at a rapid walk toward the end of the street where several people were in view.

Caskey dodged back around the corner, his lip lifted in a snarl.

## CHAPTER II.

### AFTERMATH.

BOWKER lived in New Jersey, not Manhattan as Caskey had inferred the first time he saw him. Caskey had spoken eventually of that night in the subway, when Bowker told him he wanted the new car for his wife's birthday, and Bowker said that they often spent the week-end in New York.

"Our home's in Stratford," he said, obviously pleased that Caskey had seen and remembered Mrs. Baker, "and even the best of small towns has its limits. My wife has to stand it all week and it's only fair she should have an occasional night in the Big Town. It takes the edge off when you have to gulp your food and bolt for the theater train. We'd rather have one good time right—put up at the Ritz over Sunday—than half a dozen hick ones. Stratford's all right, of course, but if you're lucky enough to marry a pretty girl you want the world to see her. You're not married? Well, you ought to have a girl, Caskey; every fellow should. It keeps you out of a lot of mischief."

"Who said I hadn't one?" Caskey had retorted with some resentment. "But I've no use for gold diggers. Girls cost money, like everything else."

That was a sample of Bowker's conversation and it had required very little effort on Caskey's part to learn all about him. It was like turning on a tap and letting the water run. Bowker was proud, yet not offensively so, of everything he possessed—his wife, his name, his money, his position. He appeared to have a naïve belief that all these things were as thrilling to others as to himself. A profound bore, perhaps, for

all his attractive ingenuousness. And, of course, Caskey had no refuge from it.

"I'm paid to be bored," Caskey assured himself. "If you're selling a man you've got to appear interested in whatever tripe he spouts. What do I care what his wife's name is or why his mother-in-law lives in Buffalo? What's it to me if he really doesn't have to work unless he wants to, or how much money his old man left? What do I care if he only lives in Jersey because it's the ancestral home?"

Bowker, however, might have been pardoned for speaking so fully of his home, for it was one of the best in Stratford. Also of his family, which was equally prominent. In every small town there are one or two families that, by virtue of wealth or lineage or both, are acknowledged leaders, and the Bowkers had held that position in Stratford for three generations.

They had all been pillars of the church, led lives of the utmost probity and rectitude. And, if they had never been very wealthy, as wealth is reckoned these days, they were quite rich enough for Stratford standards. Joe Bowker, as he was familiarly called, was the last of the line and his marriage had not as yet produced an offspring. All of which Caskey knew as he knew of sundry other matters.

The Bowker home being obviously one of the places a discerning burglar would visit first, Officer Milligan always gave it an extra look while patrolling his beat. The nightly scrutiny had become mechanical long since, for nothing really exciting ever happened in Stratford by night or day. There were far wealthier houses elsewhere to burgle and Milligan had practically given up all hope of earning promotion by any important capture.

Therefore, at about four o'clock on the morning following the night when Caskey set out with Bowker for a trial

in the new car, Milligan was petrified when he saw a man trying to force the side window of the Bowker home. The incredible seemed to have happened at last.

A good moon was still shining, but Milligan, keeping in the shadows, stole up on the grass plot and collared the man just as the other had succeeded in raising the window by pushing back the catch with a penknife, a trick that is actually easier talked about than done.

"Got you! Now then, you come along with me." The officer, as he yanked his prisoner from the strip of shadow bordering the house and swung him round so that the moonlight revealed his face, stared foolishly, released his grip and exclaimed: "Why, it's you, Mr. Bowker!"

"Of course it is. Who'd you think it was?"

Yes, of course it was Joe Bowker. It could be nobody else. Milligan even recognized the seal ring that gleamed on the other's right hand.

"Well, this is a fine one on me," admitted the officer, with a sheepish grin. "I thought you were in bed and asleep hours ago. I thought sure I saw you coming from the station this evening as usual."

"So you did, my friend. So you did. But I spent the evening in New York. I forgot my keys and I didn't want to wake the servants. I thought you'd be walking in your sleep as usual. Ha-ha! Well, good night—or good morning. I've got to get some sleep myself. And look here; keep this little adventure under your hat. You know what they'd say—'my wife's gone to the country,' and all that sort of thing."

Milligan, apart from the feel of a crisp bill against his pulpy palm, was quite willing to let the matter go unreported. The fact of the only burglar he had ever captured turning out to be the owner and tenant of the house—no, it was not an adventure he cared

to talk about. He had one or two little fiascos to his credit already so that the local wits called him "Gumshoe Bill."

Quite obviously Bowker would not talk about it either. Quite obviously the exemplary Joe Bowker, teacher of a Bible class and what not, had taken instant advantage of his wife's absence to make a big night of it. The exemplary Joe Bowker had been having a few drinks, which accounted for his rather odd manner, and he did not want his wife, neighbors, and servants to know. Bowker's minister lived right next door.

Milligan chuckled as he resumed his beat, for the joke was far from being entirely on him. For long enough the Bowkers had been held up as an ideal couple, a model of all the marital virtues. But a small-town policeman, especially one on night patrol, is a very wise person indeed and Milligan considered himself no exception.

"Everybody's alike and these model citizens are the worst," he thought. "Yes, and I know just how happy these happy marriages are once you get a private look at the works. I'll say Bowker has lost no time in breaking loose all over."

Meanwhile, as Officer Milligan philosophized on the frailty of human nature and deplored anew the fact that nothing remarkable ever happened in Stratford, the exemplary Joe had climbed through the window and produced a pocket torch as though indeed he were a burglar ignorant of his surroundings. But naturally such a proceeding was necessary for, if he illuminated the house, it would only attract the attention he had told Milligan he wished to avoid.

For the same reason he crept upstairs, his first objective being the bathroom. Here there was a green shade, and, pulling it full down, he switched on the light and locked the door. He must have a good look at himself be-

fore any one saw him. That damned officious policeman—had he noticed anything suspicious? No, impossible; moonlight has its limitations. But had his voice sounded odd, his manner strange? He had tried his best to make them appear natural. At all events any oddity would be placed infallibly to the credit of John Barleycorn. A man who is locked out at four o'clock in the morning may safely be guilty of many oddities.

Though the exemplary Joe had not been drinking, he looked as though he had experienced a very "thick" night of it indeed. His eyes were bloodshot, his hair damp and tousled, his mouth twitching. And suddenly he swayed, staggered again the tiled wall and covered his face with trembling hands as though to shut out some appealing sight.

Now that he was alone, unseen, he could give way to this emotion that was more powerful than any inspired by alcohol. What a terrible night it had been, how much he had suffered and gone through in the last few hours! How hard it had been, this perfect crime that was to be so easy!

What was that on his hands, his shirt cuffs? He shuddered, felt physically ill. So he had done it after all, the thing he had said he would never do. He had done it and now his own life was forfeit to the State. Circumstance had goaded him and goaded him until he had done it, religion and every other stand-by proving nothing but a mockery. He had done it and now—yes, now he must see to his own self-preservation. He must remove all trace of the terrible event; he could do that from his person if not from his mind and soul.

About an hour later he fell into a troubled sleep which at length became profound, and from which he was awakened by a persistent knocking that had seemed part of his terrified dreaming. It was ten o'clock, and he had

meant to be up and about bright and early as usual! What would the servants think?

"It's me, sir—Mary," came an anxious and ungrammatical reply to his query. "Cook wants to know about breakfast. I—I was afraid you must be sick, Mr. Joe."

He threw on a dressing gown, smoothed his hair, took a final look at himself in the glass, opened the door. Mary must see for herself that nothing at all was amiss.

"I overslept," he said. "Business kept me last night until I missed my train. I'd no idea it was so late. I'll have breakfast up here while I get dressed."

"You've caught a cold, Mr. Joe," said Mary accusingly.

He admitted the truth of this by coughing, then said:

"I got overheated rushing for the train and having to wait round in the station. It's nothing."

Curse these old servants with their inquisitive solicitude! Decidedly there were other angles to the servant problem, drawbacks to the ability of keeping the same one for years. Anybody would know by her manner, if not words, that Mary was an old and privileged retainer. Of course he had had to explain about missing his train; she knew he was not at home when she went to bed, though she did not know how late he had been nor of his unorthodox method of entrance. Instead of setting off for business at the usual hour he had called attention to his absence of the previous night by sleeping until this hour.

This sort of thing would never do. Decidedly the perfect crime was not the easy thing it once had seemed; it demanded not only perfect execution but perfect behavior after it. And it necessitated more than skill and artistry; luck was also essential. Without luck all one's efforts were nullified: luck could

demolish at a single blow the most clever and careful plans ever conceived.

This sort of thing would not do. He must not provoke further comment. Of course there was no crime in a fellow catching cold, but if Mary knew the real manner in which he had got overheated—— Had her kindly, faded eyes noticed anything unusual about him? No, impossible. He had seen that everything was right before, emotionally and physically exhausted, he had lain down for an "hour."

He felt considerably better after a shave and a cold tub, by which time his tray was awaiting him in the bedroom. Mary had also brought the morning mail and the local paper. The press! It held a supreme terror, yet a supreme fascination, for him now. It contained something far more interesting, more stirring than anything it had ever printed. It had a personal message for him alone.

But no; not this particular paper. What a fool he was! It could not possibly get into the morning edition. And at the thought he felt as though reprieved. Not yet would he be compelled to read it. He had finished dressing, carefully selecting a suit from the imposing file in the wardrobe, when the telephone rang on the stand by the bed. Damn the thing! Couldn't a fellow be let alone? Well, he must answer it.

"Hello? This is the Empire Insurance, Carter speaking. Hello, is that you, Bowker?"

"Yes.... What?... Yes, I tell you it's Bowker.... What?... Well, maybe *your* voice would sound a bit funny if *you* had my cold.... Yes, I caught a chill last night."

"Nothing serious, I hope. Will you be in to-day?"

"If I feel up to it and it doesn't turn out to be flu. There's so much of it going round."

"If it is flu, don't you dare come near this place. You're a nice one, getting

bunged up the minute your wife goes away. What about that Armstrong business? Anything to report?"

"Nothing that can't keep."

He hung up the receiver, feeling that he had acquitted himself creditably. A happy inspiration, this cold that might be flu. Of course he must go to New York and, if he should happen to be spotted by any one from the office, he could say he was feeling better and was on his way there. But he would take all possible precaution not to be spotted. He should give the office a very wide berth indeed. He had no longing to be scrutinized or questioned about that business he had never done. Yes, colds had their uses, and the servants would never know whether he had gone to business or not.

He had risen from the desk in the study, had just finished some necessary work and was about to go into the hall for coat and hat, when there came a ring at the door. He heard Mary open it, heard her exclaim in mingled pleasure and astonishment:

"Why, ma'am, whatever brought you back? Won't Mr. Joe be surprised! He's in the study."

Mr. Joe, standing rigid by the desk, was surprised indeed. Mrs. Bowker, of all people! He knew it though she had not spoken, though he could not see her. Mrs. Bowker! Absolutely the last person he had thought or wished to see. What could have caused her totally unexpected return? And some people said there was no such thing as luck!

### CHAPTER III.

MRS. BOWKER.

WHY, Joe, what has happened? Why aren't you at the office?" Joe explained about his cold, which now was proving its further usefulness.

"No, don't come near me," he continued, backing off. "It may be flu. You never can tell this time of year."

"You don't look at all well. You don't look yourself," said Mrs. Bowker, eying him searchingly. "What did Doctor Strong say?"

"Er—nothing. No, I didn't see him. I don't think it's flu. No, I won't see him. It's just an ordinary cold. But what brought you back?"

"I changed my mind," said Mrs. Bowker, closing the study door. "I got to worrying about you, dear, wondering how you'd manage for a whole week alone. A whole week, and we haven't been separated for a single night since our marriage! I thought it was selfish of me."

"Not at all. You shouldn't have thought anything of the kind. It's your duty—"

"No, a wife's duty is to stay with her husband. If she goes away and leaves him it's her own fault if anything happens. You know I've always said that. It's not as if mamma were sick or as if she couldn't come on a visit. It was perfectly dear of you, Joe, to urge me to go, to insist that I needed a change, but I felt all along I shouldn't. You know I did."

"But this is nonsense. You *do* need a change. And your mother coming isn't the same as you going there. No, it isn't the same at all."

"I won't go without you."

"But that's impossible. You know it is. Now be sensible. You know how I hate to have you go, but you mustn't think about me—and it'll only be for a week or ten days. I've told you that Mary can look after me all right. Apart from all else, your mother's expecting you and you must go. You really must."

"But how can she be expecting me if it's to be a surprise visit? Do you mean you wrote to her?"

"What? Oh, yes. Yes, of course. I thought she really ought to know, expectation being half the pleasure, and I didn't mean to tell you. So you see

now that you must go. You really must."

But apparently Mrs. Bowker did not see it, for she took off her hat with a gesture of finality and threw it on the desk.

"Then we'll have to wire her that I'm not coming," she said. "No, Joe, it's simply too dear of you, but I'm not going and that settles it. I knew I never could the moment the train left the Grand Central. And when I got to Fordham I couldn't stand it any longer. So I got off finally and came back. And then I ran into Carrie Esplen and she carried me off. You know how impossible it is to escape from her. She said I'd been promising long enough to stay overnight with her and, if you thought I'd gone for ten nights, I might as well spend one with her. I really had no excuse. So I stayed and we went up and saw the fire."

"Fire?"

"Yes, surely you heard about it. You know last night, that apartment house on upper Broadway. You *must* have heard, Joe."

"Oh, *that*," said Joe. "I didn't open the paper, because I was so late, but of course I heard some talk about it last night."

"I should think so—a fire like that and such loss of life. Were you very lonely last night, dear?"

"Oh, frightfully."

"What time did you get home?"

"Well, pretty late. I had that Armstrong business to attend to."

"What train did you get, dear?"

"Train? Why—er—the theater. As I say, that's how I caught cold, missing the other one and waiting round."

"Poor old dear," said Mrs. Bowker. "But, Joe, you said that was why you couldn't go to the Grand Central with me—that you had to see this horrid Armstrong."

"Yes, I know. So I had. But he was out. Yes, I couldn't see him,

though I waited a long time, and so I had to go to his house after hours."

"And was he in?"

Would she never stop asking these infernal questions? His head felt hot and it was beginning to buzz. This wifely interest was ten times worse than any servant's. He must get out of this before he lost his self-control, showed how much he dreaded her questions, those gray-green eyes of hers that never left his own. He was really not fit to stand this happy reunion.

"Oh, yes, I saw him," he said. "Quite satisfactory. And now, dear, I must be going. Sorry to have to run off like this, but I'm so late—"

"You aren't going to do any running," broke in Mrs. Bowker. "No, nor any walking either. You're going to stay right here."

"But—I can't! It's impossible. I've got to get to the office. Carter rang up and I told him—"

"I don't care what you told him. Do you think I'll allow you out, and you possibly with the flu? No, indeed. If that isn't just like a man! I knew I should never have gone, but at least I've come back in the nick of time. You poor dear, working so late and then wanting to leave a sick bed."

He repressed a wild impulse to shout at her, to fling something at her. Would she never shut up, leave him alone? His heard was bursting. She was worse than the police. He protested that he had not left a sick bed, that he had only a slight cold, that he must get to the office no matter what happened; but she was smilingly adamant.

"Flu or not, you've got a cold that may turn into anything," she said, gently compelling him into an easy-chair. "It's starting to rain, too, and you're *not* going out to-day. My! how hot your hands are! Have you a fever, dear?"

Small wonder he was hot, but he said he supposed he had a bit of a tempera-

ture, then added hastily that he felt all right and that he *must* get to the office.

"Not to-day, Joe," said Mrs. Bowker sweetly, as though addressing a willful child. "That's quite settled. It isn't as if you'd a really important engagement, or as if you were somebody who must turn up no matter how you felt. You know they can get along perfectly well without you. No, I'm here to look after you now, and out of this house you don't go a step. No, not to-day, Joe."

What could he do, short of braining her or leaving by force? He dare not arouse her suspicions by insisting on going. Did she suspect anything? He fancied vaguely there was something rather queer in the searching look of those gray-green eyes, or did his guilty conscience only imagine it? And did the same guilty conscience suggest that there was something sinister behind these wifely attentions, something faintly reminiscent of a cat playing with a mouse?

He remembered now that she had made no move to kiss him even before he warned her about his cold. But, of course, it was only imagination; she could suspect nothing and it would be entirely his own fault if she came to suspect anything.

"No, it's not as if you had to keep a terribly important engagement," repeated Mrs. Bowker, drawing up a chair opposite to him and seating herself comfortably. "We can have a nice cozy time together. Tell me what you did yesterday—*everything*, dear."

"Why—er—there's nothing particular to tell. Just the usual humdrum round, you know."

"Where did you lunch?"

"Oh, the usual place."

"Nassau Street—Dennison's?"

"Yes."

"You're lying to me. You've been lying all along."

Ah, so his instinct had been right, after all, and it was not merely a case

of a guilty conscience. There *had* been something sinister about this wifely interest and now the mask was off. The cat had done playing and now her claws were out ready for business. Mrs. Bowker's gray-green eyes were flashing and she no longer smiled, while her voice had lost its gentle purring note.

"Ly-lying?" he stammered, his heart leaping to his throat and then falling as though into a stomach full of ice water. "How? What do you mean?"

She was standing over him now, her face congested. She did not look at all pretty.

"You know perfectly well what I mean. Do you think I didn't know the moment I entered this room that something was wrong? Do you think I couldn't tell that I was the very last person you *wanted* to see? Do you think I believed for one moment this tissue of lies you've told? Did you think you could impose on *me*, no matter who else you've imposed on?"

He stared at her without speaking, wondering dully what was coming next. He did not know what to say and instinct warned him that nothing he might say could be so safe as silence. Safe! Was there safety anywhere?

"And so I want to know, and you're going to tell me," pursued Mrs. Bowker, her voice mounting with her color, "who this woman is you're spending your time with, this woman you thought I knew nothing about."

"W-what woman?"

"Yes, what woman? That's what I want to know, what I'm *going* to know!" exclaimed Mrs. Bowker, beating a fist against a palm. "I mean the woman you lunched with yesterday, not in Nassau Street but Fifty-ninth Street. I mean the woman you were with last night when you said you were selling insurance. The woman you went to the minute I was gone, who caused you to miss your train. The woman who has produced in you all this odious trickery

and deceit, whom you evidently prefer to your wife. The common-looking woman with silly blue eyes and a chemical bob," finished Mrs. Bowker, hands tragically clasping her own dark shingle. "That's the woman."

"This is a big mistake," he said, because it was plainly evident that he must say something. "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know anybody with chemical hair."

"No, you'd think it nature instead of peroxide, of course. Don't you dare lie to me any more, Joe Bowker; I've stood all I intend to stand. Everybody knows I'm not of a suspicious nature, but I've suspected you for some time. Those evenings you were supposed to be selling insurance because certain people are more easily approached after hours—you were with this horrible woman. Yes, you were. You knew you daren't attempt anything like that around Stratford and you thought I wouldn't know if it happened in New York. Oh, you've been slyness and deceit itself! And you thought no mutual acquaintance would happen to see you uptown. But Carrie Esplen saw you; she saw you and this horrible woman coming out of that Fifty-ninth Street café arm in arm."

"She saw nothing of the kind. Either she's crazy or this is one of her bad jokes. I tell you I don't know any blonde, and I wasn't anywhere near Fifty-ninth Street."

Mrs. Bowker looked doubtful but only for a fractional minute.

"How dare you sit there with that guileless face and tell such awful lies?" she burst out. "Oh, it's intolerable! You whom everybody thinks a model husband! If I didn't actually know — Let me tell you that Carrie Esplen has seen you, not once but half a dozen times. Yes, you and that horrible woman. Yes, for a month and more. And I had to pretend that she's a distant cousin and that I'd *asked* you

to take her about. For I wouldn't for the world have Carrie or anybody know what I know about you, Joe Bowker. Your father would turn in his grave if he knew."

"But, hang it all, you don't know anything! It's only what you've heard, what you've been silly enough to believe."

"I know *everything*," declared Mrs. Bowker. "Don't you think I don't. This is why you were so anxious for me to visit mamma. This is why you were so set on going to the office to-day. This is why you looked so guilty and upset when I appeared. It wasn't a cold that was troubling you. A cold—bah! You thought I was safely out of the way for a week or ten days and you'd made an appointment with this horrible woman. Who is she and what's her name?"

"I haven't the least idea. Look here, be sensible, can't you? If Carrie Esplen isn't having some fun with you, knowing your jealousy—"

"Jealousy?" caught up Mrs. Bowker, opening her eyes to the limit. "Jealousy was never in my nature and you know it. At least do me that justice. But I'm not quite a fool. And when a loving and too-trusting wife is deceived for weeks and weeks—"

"But I haven't deceived you. Good heavens! what do you take me for? I've stood this nonsense long enough. If Carrie Esplen really thinks she saw me half a dozen times with some woman—well, everybody's got a double. haven't they?"

He had not meant, of course, to mention to any one the probability of such a thing, but desperate ills demand desperate remedies and he must not let his connection with this woman be known. He must deny all knowledge of her and offer a plausible explanation. Curse this Esplen creature and the bad luck that was dogging him!

"Carrie Esplen's got me mixed up

with somebody that looks like me," he continued. "If she hasn't been having a little game with you, that's the only explanation. It's darned easier for two people to look alike—yes, and even talk alike—than you'd think. It doesn't happen only in storybooks. I know from experience. I mean we've had more than one case at the office when settling a claim. The probability of the thing is well known in our business. I say that either Carrie Esplen's been fooling or there's some one in New York who looks like me."

He saw his advantage and proceeded to consolidate it. Mrs. Bowker was wavering, ready to believe because at heart she wished to believe. The moment had come for him to assume the mantle of outraged virtue, to air his indignation and wounded feelings. By George! things had come to a nice pass when a model husband was to be accused of all the crimes in the calendar simply on the say-so of a Carrie Esplen. In short he considered it an excellent opportunity for walking out of the house in an incandescent glow of righteous indignation.

But he did not walk out of the house, not that day nor the day after. Mrs. Bowker, in a sudden flood of relief and contrition, proceeded to weep while she confessed her secret jealousy and the wrong she had done him by believing such evidence. It was impossible to escape her immediate efforts at atonement. And then the cold, of which he had spoken so largely, developed into a fever that sent him to bed.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### SOMETHING WRONG SOMEWHERE.

DAN CLUER spent the whole of the day in trying to locate the man whom he had called Murgatroyd and who had so adroitly given him the slip.

"I'll bet it's him," thought Cluer, whose memory for faces was superior

to his memory of grammar. "He wouldn't have slipped me like this if he wasn't. And it's ten to one he's living somewhere in this neighborhood. He wouldn't be uptown at that hour if he wasn't."

This was a shrewd guess but the field, while thus narrowed, remained formidable enough. Though he'd passed the man on Broadway and One Hundred and First Street and the other had turned toward West End Avenue, it did not follow that he lived west of Broadway. Recognizing Cluer by instinct, if nothing else, he might have been laying a false trail. Cluer believed so. "For," Cluer thought, "Amsterdam Avenue would be more his size."

This also was shrewd reasoning yet not shrewd enough owing to Cluer's superficial knowledge of the district. So to Amsterdam Avenue he went, inquiring as far as Columbus Avenue, but not a single person did he find who really knew Murgatroyd. Of course the man would not be living under that name now but nobody seemed able to identify the description Cluer gave. Many thought they did and sent him hunting after people who proved to be different persons altogether.

So back Cluer came to Broadway and the following morning, at about the hour when Mrs. Bowker was thinking of starting homeward to Stratford, he knocked at the basement of a house between West End Avenue and the Drive. He had had no idea that cheap roomers were to be found in that district, forgetful of the fact that there are exceptions to all rules. Mrs. Schmaltz rented the first two floors to a select private school for children, the top floor to roomers, while she and her husband inhabited the basement.

"I want to see Mr. Caskey."

"He iss nod in."

"What!" said Cluer, his blue eyes searching. "He can't have left so early as this."

"He iss nod in because he iss oud. Nor will he be in eider. He have vent avay."

"Oh, that's too bad. When did he go?"

Caskey had left the previous morning, a taxi having called for him and his trunk.

"While I was bumming up and down Amsterdam Avenue. Certainly lost no time," reflected Cluer and, in the guise of an old friend of the absent one, proceeded to put further questions.

"I come from his home town," he confided, "and this is the only address he put on his letters. Where does he work?"

Mrs. Schmaltz said she did not know, and Cluer had no reason to doubt her.

"All I know iss dot he vas in der ottermobile business someveres," she added. "I dink he have gone avay to get married, yes. Maybe you iss best man, hein?"

"No," said Cluer with a little smile, "he's the best man—so far. He didn't tell me he was fixing to get married."

Caskey, it seemed, had not told his landlady either. But women don't have to be told such things. He had had a picture in his room and the original called for him at the house one day.

"A little blonde, eh?" said Cluer. "Well, I hope I'm in time for the wedding."

He walked back to Broadway, pondering the matter. No doubt now that Murgatroyd was Caskey; this second disappearing act could not be coincidence. If only he had been dead sure the night before last! However, clean shaven as Murgatroyd now was, it had been no mean feat even to half recognize him by poor artificial light and in a passing glance. Cluer was not given to expecting miracles from himself or any one. He had a fund of common sense, patience, and humor.

"Walked right into my hand and I let him slip through," he mused, uncon-

sciously opening and closing his sturdy fingers. "Well, well, no use crying about it. Has he skipped town or dunned up somewhere else? The automobile business, eh? Well, let's try for a starter where there's the most of 'em, around Columbus Circle. No harm having a look there before lunch."

Thus he came in due course, and a very short course it proved, to Fifty-ninth Street and Mr. Rosenbloom, finding the latter in an overheated condition.

"Caskey? Do I know him?" shouted Mr. Rosenbloom. "I should say yes, to my sorrow. To my sorrow I should say it. He has stolen one of my best cars, a brand-new model. From the police you are, yes?"

"From the police I am, yes, in a sort of a kind of a way," nodded Cluer and, putting a hand in his pocket, disclosed a silver shield on his broad palm. "But you're not the only one he's ever robbed. Comfort yourself with the thought, if you forgot the insurance."

No, Mr. Rosenbloom did not forget things like that. Of course the car was insured against almost everything but bigamy. That, however, was not the point. To think he had been treated thus after all his kindness! To think now such a fine judge of character had been imposed on by a known thief with faked credentials!

"Such a deceiver!" said Mr. Rosenbloom. "He tells me now that maybe he has a buyer for that expensive model and all the time he wants me to hurry up and get it so's he can steal it. I think sure I make a fine sale—over three thousand dollars cash money I tell you—and all I get is law costs and a claim fight. And you say to me: 'Comfort yourself!'"

"Well," said Cluer, "you're lucky even if you don't know it. The last party he nicked lost five thousand that wasn't insured. No, not an automobile but a forged check. Yes, Caskey could give you handsome credentials, fake

anything in writing. But this gas-wagon stealing's a new line of his. Seems like he was in a hurry to quit town."

But Cluer knew there was something wrong somewhere. Why should Caskey quit his lodgings and then wait so long before quitting town? And why steal an automobile, bring more pursuers on his track, when a train would serve as well or better? If he had meant simply to change his address and leave town under cover of night, he could have stolen out in various less conspicuous ways.

No, it did not seem reasonable and Cluer's wide experience told him it was the reasonable things that happened nine times out of ten. He never contemplated the improbable until he had exhausted the probable. There was something wrong somewhere, some little thing he did not understand.

"For," he thought, "it's not as if a general alarm was out for him, and his mug was in the gallery, so that he'd be sure the ferries and trains would be watched. No, he could have slipped out easy. And what about his trunk?"

Rosenbloom knew nothing about that, but he suggested that if Caskey knew Cluer was after him he had probably checked his trunk at some station and then called for it in the car.

"He worked here yesterday just the same as usual," said Rosenbloom, and explained how he always went home about nine, leaving the trusted Caskey to lock up. All he knew was that both Caskey and the car had gone and that apparently no one had seen them go.

"Well," said Cluer at length, "I hear he has a girl friend and, if she didn't go with him, I guess I can get a line on his new address by watching her mail, if in no other way. I don't know where she lives. But maybe you do?"

"I should be a nice one to trouble my head with such things," said Rosenbloom. "I am an ottermobile dealer.

Of Caskey I know nothing like that. No girl ever called here for him. He was a good enough worker and he had brains, but not so much as he thought he had. One of these fellers now who think, if only the world did right by them, they should be president or something. Girls he may have had in plenty, but a wife, no."

"A little blonde," said Cluer, who always persisted. "A good looker."

"Nu," said Rosenbloom and took off his spectacles. "That is funny. You say a little blonde and I suddenly remember something. Now I tell you. One night maybe a month ago I see Caskey and a pretty little blonde. Yes, I pass them on the street, on upper Broadway where I'm walking on business. I turn for a second look because I'm not sure it's Caskey. The next day I say to him: 'How is it, Caskey, I see you last night at ten o'clock with a lady when I pay you to keep open until eleven thirty?' And he swears up and down and sideways that I've made a mistake. And I believed him for I wasn't sure and my eyesight is not so good. And people, like things, maybe look different at night. But now I know that the deceiver was lying and I was a fool to believe him. He could lie, Mr. Cluer, looking you in the eye and innocent as an unborn baby. Such a deceiver!"

It was here that the telephone informed Mr. Rosenbloom that it was highly probable both the deceiver and the stolen car had been found. Could he take the lunch hour and come out and make sure?

## CHAPTER V.

### THE END OF CASKEY?

CLUER accompanied Rosenbloom because he also wished to identify the remains, resolve any lingering doubt that Caskey was Murgatroyd.

"Poor feller," said Rosenbloom, "he's been killed making his get-away. I

didn't wish him anything like this. Well, if it's him, that seems to end your case, Mr. Cluer."

"I'm just as glad in a way," said Cluer, and explained that he represented the Bankers' Protective Association and how Caskey was not what Rosenbloom had called a known crook.

"Caskey isn't his right name, of course, and it's no matter what his real one is," he added. "He comes of a mighty good family up State though they're all dead now. He's a college graduate and was meant for a better finish than this. But you said a wise thing, Mr. Rosenbloom; he always thought he'd more brains than anybody and that he ought to get a good living without working too hard. That, and a natural-born gift for imitating handwriting, got him into trouble. But he's never done time nor made a steady job of forgery. Too dangerous, though, not to be put away for what he did do, I think."

"He worked hard and honest enough with me," said Rosenbloom who was now anxious to see all Caskey's good qualities, even including some that the other had never owned. "And anybody could tell he come of good people, Mr. Cluer. He was a very likable feller and always a good dresser. To see him on the street you might have thought him anybody. He didn't seem to have no real harm in him, Mr. Cluer, if you know what I mean."

"I guess that's right," nodded the other. "I didn't fancy this job much when I started on it. There are some lads you don't mind putting away, and some you do. I guess Caskey, as we may still call him, was more driven by circumstances, and this idea of getting his due from the world, than by any real criminal bent. More weak than wicked. All the same, once a man goes crooked you never know what he may do. And the banks had to get him before he took it into his head to put

over something big. Too clever and dangerous, I say, to be loose."

Cluer enlarged on this point, the need of the association to get every criminal no matter how long it took, and dwelt with pardonable pride on the fact that, owing to the strict enforcement of that rule, crooks were giving his clients an increasingly wide berth.

"You've got to get 'em, big or little," he said, and explained that his meeting with Caskey the other night had been entirely accidental.

"As a matter of fact, I didn't know for sure he was in New York," he said. "He led me a pretty dance and I'll kind of miss him, now he's gone. In fact, I got quite fond of him in a way, he was so slick and artful with his aliases and disappearing acts. He worked my head as much as my feet. I've been trailing him a good long time and now I feel kind of lonesome and down-hearted. My business is a game and lads like Caskey give it zip. And yet, as I say, I'm glad in a way I didn't have to put the nippers on him."

There are many places, not so far from Jersey City, where such an accident might happen, yet few where it could go undiscovered for so long as in this instance. The spot where Cluer and Rosenbloom eventually found themselves was an unfrequented road edged with an abyss where quarrying operations of a sort had been carried on when the State highways were being made. Indeed, the place was still known locally as "The Quarry Hole."

There was quite a sharp curve at the foot of a hill just before one approached it from the north, and here there was an appropriately marked sign. But even at night it was not really a dangerous spot if both car and driver were normal. Experienced motorists could tell of many places more risky. There had never been an accident there, barring the time when a mule fell over, but since those days a rail fence had been

erected and there was really quite an ample safety margin between it and the brink of the old quarry.

There is, however, no providing against the vagaries of a mule, an automobile, or human nature. It was quite clear that the car must have been out of control when it came to take the curve at the foot of the hill, and it had shot through the rail fence and gone rocketing into the quarry hole.

And so it had lain, a total wreck partly consumed by fire, throughout the night and a good part of the morning. It was a hard road on which rain had not fallen for over a week and there were practically no wheel marks to shout aloud the tragedy. Undoubtedly several motorists had passed the spot before one, more curious or observant than the rest, stopped to have a look at the broken fence and conjecture how it had happened.

There could be no question that it was Caskey. He had been thrown clear when the car finally finished, wheels up, and so he had not been burned or disfigured. His neck and several bones were broken but, apart from a head wound and a few superficial cuts, there was nothing to make identification in any way doubtful. A letter had been found in his pocket addressed to "Joe," and there was also a business card of Rosenbloom's.

The remains had been removed to an abandoned shed in the vicinity, once used by the quarrymen, and the coroner's physician had finished his examination when Cluer and Rosenbloom arrived. The local chief of police had met them.

"Yes, it's him, poor feller," repeated Rosenbloom. "My manager, Joe Caskey. There ain't a doubt of it."

"None in the world," agreed Cluer. "I knew I couldn't be wrong. Yes, it's Murgatroyd."

Browne, the police chief, had been put in possession of Caskey's private history

which, he considered, explained everything.

"We thought it was just another case of fool speeding," he said to Cluer, "but it's clear now he had something to speed for if you were behind him."

"So far behind you couldn't notice it," grunted Cluer. "He wasn't hurrying like this just on my account."

That was still the small thing he could not understand, the thing that did not seem reasonable, and a few more had come to join it. Why had Caskey chosen this route? Why should he have been here on this unfrequented road, fleeing madly like one in a panic as though the police were at his heels? And surely he had been a seasoned driver, not one to go rocketing down a strange hill at night with a free engine?

"Yes, of course he was experienced," said Rosenbloom to this question, "but it was a new car and maybe the brakes didn't work right. Or maybe now he didn't know there was a sharp curve ahead. There should be a lamp here."

"Was he familiar with this part of Jersey?" asked Cluer, and Rosenbloom said he could not say. There was so much he did not know about Caskey. He might formerly have lived in this neighborhood for all Rosenbloom knew.

"I'll tell you why he came this way and why he was in such a hurry," said Browne. "He had a date to meet his girl. Yes, that was the letter we found in his pocket, the only one he had. He had chucked away the envelope so we didn't know his last name, but we took a chance on you, Mr. Rosenbloom, knowing who 'Joe' was. Apart from your card, there's the license number which hasn't been destroyed. Here's the note, for it isn't much more than that."

Cluer and Rosenbloom read the following:

DARLING JOE: Just a line to say I got your message and things O. K. I have everything

ready and will meet you to-morrow night at the station at the time you say. Call me up before if you can without danger. Well, good-by, honey, for the present. All my love and kisses, honey.

YOUR OWN BUNNY.

This letter, in an obviously feminine hand, was dated two days past and bore an address on upper Broadway, New York.

"The little blonde, I'll bet," said Cluer. "And it's dollars to doughnuts that that's where Caskey checked his trunk, for it certainly wasn't in the car. She was going to bring it with her stuff."

"Yes, I should say so," said Rosenbloom. "He wasn't now taking any chances of you tracing him through an express company. He leaves his trunk now at this girl's place and she brings it along under her name. Pretty foxy. I told you that that poor feller had brains. And he took the ottermobile in case you might happen to have set a watch on the trains, Mr. Cluer.

"It's hard to tell where they were going or what station they were to meet at," said Browne, "seeing that there are about half a dozen different railroads within trolley distance of here. Caskey may have meant to leave the car somewhere about here and catch a trolley back to Jersey City. Or he may have agreed to meet the girl at some station down the line. But, considering all the circumstances, I figure that he lost his way; that would account for him being on this road which don't rightly lead anywhere. He didn't know the district like maybe he thought he did—"

"That would be Caskey all over, poor feller," broke in Rosenbloom. "Not so wise as he thought he was."

"And then," proceeded Browne, "he finds he's taken the wrong road and that he's got to step on her if he's to keep that date. So, not knowing the neighborhood, he comes down that hill lickety-split and finds too late that he can't take the curve. He claps on the

brakes, the car skids, and there you are. And, being a new car like Mr. Rosenbloom says, it makes the finish all the more certain."

"Maybe he stepped on the accelerator instead of the foot brake," suggested Rosenbloom. "Even an experienced driver can do that in a car he don't know. He was all upset anyway, poor feller, not knowing how close you might be behind him, Mr. Cluer. Now that I come to think of it, he was jumpy all day yesterday, not at all like himself. It shows he wasn't himself by dressing like that. Look at them garters."

Of course Cluer had noticed them from force of habit as he had carefully noted everything about the remains. Caskey's garters were of different colors, if black may be called a color; the other garter was blue. Cluer had thought this simply a matter of economy; instead of buying a new pair when one garter wore out before its fellow, Caskey had utilized the still useful member. Of course many people do this with more than garters. Nor was Cluer satisfied, though he gave the matter no more than passing attention, that this was not the right explanation.

Rosenbloom's idea that Caskey had been so upset that he had put them on by mistake and never noticed it, seemed more ingenious than probable. Yet, of course, such mistakes can and do happen.

"Well," said Cluer at length, "this is where my case ends and there don't seem to be anything left to do but give him decent burial. Seems kind of funny he'd stage an elopement with his girl and have only about ten dollars and some bird seed in his pocket."

"She's taking care of the bank roll, you bet," said Rosenbloom. "He put whatever coin he had in that trunk. That's what I'd have done."

"I suppose so," agreed Cluer. "Well, I've got to go and see this little Bunny —break the sad news to mother. She'll

be wondering why Caskey didn't keep that date. I suppose she was so mad about it she didn't call him up at the store, or maybe she was afraid to. She must be worried stiff. He's got no relatives and so she'll have to bury him. If by any chance she won't, and he hasn't left enough money, I'll see he don't go to potter's field."

"No," said Rosenbloom with a gesture, "you leave that to me, Mr. Cluer. He worked for me, poor feller, not you."

"We'll go halves then," said Cluer. "He worked for me too in a way. He gave me a lot of interest and I'll miss him."

## CHAPTER VI.

### NOT ENTIRELY REASONABLE.

HAD Cluer been the traditional detective he would have known infallibly by some prescience or process that it was not an accident but murder, that Caskey had a double and had plotted carefully to change places with him. The perfect crime would have contained some flaw that revealed the true answer to his penetrating intelligence, or some happy accident would have awakened his suspicions and set him on the right track.

But Cluer was simply a shrewd, everyday sort of sleuth and in real life the detection of crime is due rather to painstaking effort, the careful examination of a multitude of seemingly unrelated incidents and facts, than to any inspiration or fortuitous circumstance.

And Cluer had no idea that a crime had been committed; neither had Browne nor Rosenbloom nor any of all those who, for one reason or another, came to look at the victim or scene of the tragedy. There was nothing to suggest that it was anything but what it seemed, nothing that had not been explained.

Cluer had never heard of Joe Bowker and hardly knew there was such a town

as Stratford, New Jersey. And the idea of Caskey having a double never entered his mind. There was no reason why it should. Finally, apart from all else, he would have said that murder was not in Caskey's line, although none knew better than Cluer that once a man has begun a criminal career he cannot put a boundary to his actions, define his degrees of turpitude. Sooner or later he may find himself in a situation where to kill seems the only way out.

But although Cluer had absolutely no suspicion of the truth, nor even the half truth, and although everything had been explained, he was left with a feeling that is almost too vague to define and of which he himself was but dimly conscious. Dissatisfaction is too strong a word but his feeling was akin to that. He felt that while everything had been fully explained some of the explanations might have been a little more reasonable. And, back in his mind, was the unforgettable knowledge that Caskey had proved himself a very slippery and resourceful customer indeed.

Still, it may be stressed, Cluer really had no cause for suspicion and he actually believed the hunt over; his case ended. Yet the vaguely dissatisfied feeling remained, was at work subconsciously as he set out to locate Bunny.

Broadway numerical addresses are a puzzle to all but those who happen to reside at them and Cluer could only make a guess at the street, though he knew from the size of the number that it must be well uptown. He had no name to go by and so it was useless to consult a directory. Up around Trinity Cemetery, that was the nearest he could surmise, and a vague memory stirred within him as he thought of that neighborhood.

Suspicion became certainty when he came within sight of the apartment house, when he recognized it under the name of The Winthrop. The westering sun above the Palisades struck no glory

from its windows for, except for the lower floors, there was hardly a pane of glass left. From the second floor up it was a fire-gutted wreck, the windows looking like tragic blackened eyesockets.

The Winthrop! Why, that was where the big fire had been last night! Of course Cluer had heard about it, had even seen from far downtown its tragic message written in the sky. He had even scanned the account in the morning paper, remembering only the street and the name of the building. Nor had Browne or Rosenbloom connected Bunny's address with this place, of which they too must have read.

There was a fireman still on guard, perhaps one of the salvage corps, talking with the policeman on beat, and Cluer introduced himself.

"Formerly of Headquarters," he said, showing his badge. "Yes, I used to be on the cops. Now I'm looking for a party who wrote a letter from this place; she signs herself 'Bunny' and that's all the name I know."

"What's she look like?" asked the policeman, and Cluer replied that he did not know that either.

"I'm betting she's a little blonde," he added.

"It might be Mrs. Whelan," said the patrolman, scratching his chin. "If it is, she's up in Balmer's undertaking rooms—two blocks south on Amsterdam. Yes, she's one of them that was killed last night—jumped from a fourth floor window, poor soul. I knew her by sight."

"I wasn't looking for a married woman," said Cluer, remembering suddenly that he had seen the name Mrs. Whelan heading the list of fatalities. "I guess she isn't my party."

"Well, like as not," agreed the policeman. "The janitor can tell you more than me. He's still here. There's blondes and blondes, of course, but I remember Mrs. Whalen. Anybody would."

The janitor, an intelligent Belgian, remembered Mrs. Whelan much better, and Cluer could not escape the feeling that the policeman's conjecture was right. Blondes might be numerous, but there had been only one tenant of The Winthrop worthy of that classification.

"What you call a true blonde," affirmed the janitor, twirling his little mustache. "Veree pretty, veree chic. A young widow, she zay. She have a small service flat, do her own cooking and everyzing. She come here sree-four months ago and she was leaving last night."

"How do you mean, leaving? Giving up the place for good, eh?"

Yes, it was a sublet, a furnished flat on a six-month lease, and Mrs. Whelan's time had nearly expired. She had given up the keys last night and her trunks were all packed; and then had come the fire. Another hour and she would have been away safe and sound. Such are the little ironies of life.

"It's not her I want to see," said Cluer when his informant suggested a visit to the undertaker, "but a friend of hers, a man by the name of Caskey."

The janitor said he knew nobody by that name. Whereupon Cluer proceeded to give a very comprehensive and detailed description of Caskey.

"I know him," said the janitor with conviction. "Yes, I see zat young man though I never hear his name. I see zem come in togezzer many times. Of zat I am sure. Why, I see zat young man here last night."

"When?"

"Two-sree hours after the fire start to begin. About one o'clock in the morning, I should have zay."

"One o'clock in the morning?" echoed Cluer. "Are you sure about that?"

Yes, the janitor was quite sure, of the man if not the precise hour. But it was one o'clock or later. Did he not know the man on sight and had he not spoken with him face to face?

"Caskey, as you zay he is call, comes to me where I stand watching the fire as she is brought under control," said the janitor, with appropriate gestures. "He is all of an excitement. He is frantic. He has just heard about the fire. He recognizes me, the janitor, and so addresses me for the information. Mrs. Whelan, where is she? He have heard people has been killed. Ah, mon Dieu! Where is Mrs. Whelan?"

Cluer, listening patiently and with interest, could picture the scene. So this was why Bunny had not called up Rosenbloom's to ask Caskey why he had failed to keep their appointment. She had not been angry nor overcautious; she had been dead.

Cluer saw Rosenbloom that same evening, dropped in at the other's place before he left and told him the result of his inquiry.

"Mrs. Whelan?" said Rosenbloom, and plucked a newspaper from his desk. "Why, here's her picture in the evening paper. I was just looking at it. Well, well, so that's Bunny?"

"Uh-huh. Didn't you recognize her?"

"I did not, said Rosenbloom, squinting anew at the paper. "She don't look like the blonde I saw Caskey with that night—not that you could tell your own mamma by any newspaper photo."

"No, and you only saw her once. I think it's only reasonable to assume that she's the same one you saw. Anyway, it's clear that she was the one who was going to elope with Caskey. There's no doubt of that."

Rosenbloom took a cigar, bit off the end meditatively, and then offered the box to Cluer.

"But look here," he said, "if Caskey, poor feller, was up there at one o'clock this morning, how could he be laying out there in Jersey with a broken neck? I mean now didn't the coroner's physician say he'd been dead nearly twelve hours? Didn't he say it must have

happened around eleven last night? Well, how could now Caskey, poor feller, be in two places at once? That ain't reasonable, Mr. Cluer."

"It is not," agreed Cluer, pleased at the other using his favorite word. "Of course I spotted it at once and I've been thinking about it since I talked with that janitor. It looks as if the thing couldn't happen, but the fact remains that it did."

"Yes? You mean now that either the janitor or the doc must have made a mistake? Both of 'em can't be right, Mr. Cluer."

"Well, the janitor's right," said Cluer with conviction. "His story's backed up. I went to Balmer's undertaking rooms to see if Caskey had been there, and he had. He went straight from The Winthrop when he learned Mrs. Whelan had been taken there. He didn't give any name, just said he was a friend and wanted to make sure it was her, but they described him to me exactly. In fact, Balmer himself remembered seeing him once or twice with Mrs. Whelan. It was Caskey all right."

"Well," said Rosenbloom, "it always beat me how a doc could tell when a person must have died, and this just shows you. Guesswork, that's all it is, like I always said. As a matter of fact now, Caskey couldn't have had that accident until somewhere around two o'clock at least."

"If it was an accident."

"How do you mean, 'if it was an accident'? What else could it be?"

"Well, suicide," said Cluer, staring at the ash of his cigar. "You see, this is what must have happened: When Mrs. Whelan didn't show up at the station, Caskey waits around a while and then decides to phone The Winthrop to see if she's left. We've proof now that their date must have been near midnight, otherwise she'd have left the flat before the fire started. Well, Caskey can't get through to the flat and maybe

the exchange tells him why. Anyway he beats it up there——"

"In the ottermobile?"

"No, that don't seem reasonable," said Cluer, now slowly pacing the little office. "Of course, he must have abandoned the car before going to the station and it isn't likely he'd go after it. He'd make just as good or better time by the Hudson tunnel. Neither the janitor nor undertaker saw an automobile, for that matter."

"On the other hand," he continued, pausing to eye the ceiling, "it don't seem reasonable for him to hunt up the car after he quit town the second time. In fact, it seems considerably less reasonable."

"Yes, I should say so," agreed Rosenbloom, putting on his spectacles as though he could thereby magnify his mental vision. "How should he know now that the ottermobile would still be there, after leaving it all that time? I guess he must have left it handy to the station and come back here in it, even if the janitor and undertaker didn't see it."

"Yes, I guess he must."

"And you think now maybe that, being so broke up over the death of his girl, he decided to make a die of it?"

"Maybe," nodded Cluer. "I mean nobody could really tell if it happend by mistake or on purpose. It's one of those things that could be either suicide or an accident."

"Yes, or even murder."

"Yes, or even murder," assented Cluer, "if Caskey had a clever and bitter enough enemy."

"He'd none that I know of unless now maybe this Mrs. Whelan's husband—if she was a grass widow instead of a real one. But what about Caskey's trunk?" pursued Rosenbloom, who had had ample time to ponder his generosity. "I ain't going back on what I said about burying him, Mr. Cluer, but at the same time if he left the money and there's no

relatives to claim it—know what I mean? There's no reason why the State should grab it all. I've got a brother-in-law in the burying business and I'll see that he gives Caskey, poor feller, a bargain. I can see that he gets the best in coffins at an inside family price. I hope that trunk ain't now been burned, Mr. Cluer."

"I asked the janitor and he don't remember it being delivered," said Cluer. "But it must have been, for in her letter Mrs. Whelan speaks of having received his 'things.' Most everything in the flat has gone up in smoke but I'll have to see the salvage boys. Maybe it was saved."

"Let's hope so," said Rosenbloom. "I'd hate to see good money burned and Caskey must have had his savings in it. I paid him good money, Mr. Cluer. And I know he'd want to pay for his own funeral. He was always independent like that, Mr. Cluer, and I'd like to carry out his wishes, poor feller."

## CHAPTER VII.

### CLUER HAS AN IDEA.

CLUER lay awake that night pondering his talk with the janitor, the undertaker, and Rosenbloom. This case which he had thought ended seemed in a sense to be only beginning. At least it would not let him rest but kept him mentally alert, as though he were still trying to locate the elusive Caskey. His vague feeling of dissatisfaction had increased, become definite. He felt irritated also like one who, having the last piece of a jigsaw puzzle in his hand, is unable to fit it properly into the obvious place, completing the picture. Something was wrong.

No, he was not satisfied; there was still some little thing wrong somewhere, something he did not understand, something that made the whole chain of events surrounding Caskey's death not quite reasonable. Some little part of

the picture threw all the rest slightly out of perspective; some little thing was out of drawing. A perfect picture in a way and yet—well, not quite reasonable. No, not quite.

He lay on his sturdy back, hands clasped under his head, and stared at the ceiling as was his wont when grappling with a problem. Unlike Rosenbloom, he knew from ample experience that doctors rarely make a mistake in approximating the time of a person's death, or if they do the margin of error is small.

"But in this case," thought Cluer, "it's a matter of three or four hours. Balmer says it was about half past one when Caskey came, the last visitor to the place. Well, he couldn't get to that quarry hole in Jersey under an hour at least, counting the time he spent at the undertaker's. That would make it half past two—say three, to be reasonable. That's a difference of four hours. No doctor I ever met could make a mistake like that."

The automobile clock and Caskey's watch were smashed to flinders; if they'd been whole they might have stopped at the hour he was killed. That would have helped. But I've got nothing to go by but a couple of statements that are three or four hours out—and the worst part of it is, both seem to be right. If I even knew where Caskey was to have kept that date with Mrs. Whelan, what station or line, and where they were making for."

The Erie? West Shore? D. L. & W.? Pennsylvania? Lehigh Valley? C. R. of N. J?

Police Chief Browne was right and there were half a dozen railroads within reasonable radius. But why New Jersey particularly? Of course, if Caskey thought the Pennsylvania and Grand Central stations might be watched—

But had he thought so in fact and not theory?

"If he believed I was as close after

him as that," thought Cluer, "he would never have worked at Rosenbloom's all that day; he'd have cleared out instead of running the chance of me trailing him to the store. There must be some good reason why he waited till night, something that had nothing to do with Mrs. Whelan for she could have joined him anywhere at any time. It all comes back to that automobile."

Cluer felt, as he had felt from the first, that the stealing of the car demanded a more logical explanation than any that had been offered. The unreasonableness of the case had its genesis there. Why had Caskey taken the automobile? There must be an explanation other than Rosenbloom's—that he had feared the stations might be watched. Stations! What about the ferries? What sense was there in stealing a car and then taking a ferry where one would be far more likely to meet the observation one wished to avoid? Joe Caskey was no fool.

"Why," thought Cluer, "if that was his only motive he wouldn't have gone across the river at all. He could have slid out to Connecticut—anywhere. Steal a car and then advertise the fact? That's just about what it amounts to. What did he really take it for? He didn't even use it to carry his trunk. What purpose did it serve that a train couldn't?"

The answer was obvious; if there had been no automobile there could have been no accident. Joe Caskey would be alive instead of dead.

At this thought Cluer sat up and not merely figuratively; he sat up in the bed as though trying to visualize something even in the material darkness. If Joe Caskey were alive! He had not guessed yet even half the truth, but he had taken the first step toward it. For the first time the thought presented itself seriously that it might have been murder.

What was that Rosenbloom had said about the possibility of Mrs. Whelan having a husband?

"That would explain a whole lot," thought Cluer, groping his way. "If there was another man in the case and Caskey was killed—— No, that's impossible; Caskey couldn't be in two places at the same time. If the janitor and the doc are both right, he couldn't be dead at eleven and alive at one. No, not unless that corpse isn't Caskey but somebody who looks just like him."

Cluer smiled at the idea, relaxed mentally and physically. It seemed too improbable, something of which he had heard but never personally experienced. It would not be a case of a person mutilated beyond positive identification, dressed up to look like somebody else. He had personal experience of such cases. Yet the other and more improbable kind actually happened, had their place in criminal annals. What about the world-famous case of Adolf Beck?

"Hold on now," thought Cluer, feeling a strange excitement beginning to possess him. "What about those garters? If even the most careful dresser in the world changed clothes in the dark mightn't he make such a mistake? *And blue looks black at night.* By Jupiter! that would be a reasonable explanation. If Caskey, clever dog, killed this double it would make everything reasonable. It would explain why he waited and took the car, why he went to that out-of-the-way place. And I'll bet he was to meet Mrs. Whelan, not in Jersey, but at the Grand Central or Pennsylvania. He came back to New York, after he'd done the killing, and learned of the fire. It would explain why the janitor and doc are both right. It may be improbable but, by Jupiter! it's the only theory that makes everything reasonable. Any-way it's certainly worth following up."

*To be concluded in the next issue.*



# CRUTCH FREEMAN

*By* Clay Perry

*Who wrote "The Sun Dancers."*

About a young small-town cripple to whom meanness was the breath of life.

PERLEY FREEMAN, thirteen years old and large and sharp-witted for his age, stood in the stag line at the annual harvest ball, which was held each other October at the full moon in the town hall at Savoy. Perley was a leader among youths of his own age and older. Some of the stags in long trousers who hung at the rail along the stairs were members of his gang. He led them in everything except dancing. He could outrun, outclimb, outswim and outwit almost all of them, but he had not learned to dance. He pretended to scorn this social exercise.

Indeed, most of the scornful stags affected to be there to make fun of those who did dance. They snickered and drawled out crude witticisms and passed remarks that caused the girls to toss their heads and flush. Sometimes

they drew the righteous wrath of some sweating swain who would have thrashed one or more of them but refrained from fighting because he could not thrash all of them together.

Perley Freeman really wanted to dance, but he pretended to hate girls. He teased them and tortured them, being particularly generous with his boyish cruelty to Mary Martin, who was very remotely related to him, and whom he called cousin. He teased Mary about "Pinky" Burden, who was not a member of Perley's gang and whom Perley regularly licked, simply for the fun of showing his superiority—or so he thought. It never occurred to him that his action was inspired by jealousy.

Pinky Burden was not at the dance. But his elder brother, Sam, was there. He had as his partner Flossie Bird, a somewhat blowsy blond beauty whose

reputation was also somewhat blowsy, but with whom Sam was infatuated. He danced with her and her alone. Perley was quick to notice it. He began making sotto-voce remarks about Flossie, whenever Sam whirled her close to the stag line. "Rusty" Rourke, Perley's chief of staff, warned his general.

"You better be careful," he said. "Sam Burden's got a chip on his shoulder."

"Huh!" sniffed Perley. And then, a moment later, just as Sam swung near the stag line again, he added: "Yeah, but he's got a chippy in his arms right now."

Sam Burden heard. He released Flossie so suddenly that she reeled into the arms of an embarrassed stag. Perley saw Sam coming and ducked for the head of the stairs. Sam had murder in his eyes. He missed grasping the lad's blouse as it ballooned out in the draft blowing up the stairs; but he swung at Perley with his foot—and caught him.

Perley landed in a limp heap at the bottom of the steep, narrow stairway and lay still. Sam caught his giggling partner to him and resumed his 'round-and-round, to the tune of a scraping violin, a mellifluous guitar, and a wheezy organ—the orchestra for the harvest ball.

"It learned him a lesson, I guess," he gritted.

One week later Pinky Burden came panting home to the hillside farm, tears standing in his eyes, and gasped out the news to his brother.

"Perley Freeman's goin' to be took to the hospital over the Alps," he said, referring to the nearest city, which lay beyond the range of sharp hills at the foot of which nestled the little border village of Savoy. "They're goin' to amputate his leg. It was broke in three places, an'—"

"The hell they be!" cried Sam Burden, startled and shocked. "That's old woman's talk. I'll jest go and see about that."

It was dusk as Sam started down the road toward the Freeman farm, which lay beyond the Belle River bridge. He got only as far as the bridge. He was met there by a vengeful gang armed with clubs and stones. He escaped death only by leaping into the river and swimming. That night he left Savoy and Flossie Bird and was never seen again.

They brought Perley home from the hospital to recuperate. He lay and looked through the bedroom window, over the tops of the lilacs with their frost-withered leaves to the white summits of the Alps, which, he thought, he would never climb again as he had used to do, to come swooping down on skis, gathering glory out of speed and danger. His right leg was now six inches long.

The settlement which the Freeman family made to stave off civil suit for damages was more than the equal of what Sam Burden's birthright would have been had he stayed in Savoy to claim it. It gave Perley Freeman independence such as he never would have enjoyed had he not been made a cripple by a kick. His deformity excused him from any sort of toil.

His youth, however, lent him new strength. He began walking about on crutches. Soon he discarded one of them, had the crosspiece of the other adjusted and padded to fit the stub of his leg, the crutch equipped with a sharp steel spike in the end, and swung himself along at surprising speed and with astonishing agility. His arms grew to be like corded rawhide from the constant use of them.

It was inevitable that he should become known as "Crutch" Freeman. He did not seem to mind it. Indeed, the nickname was given more in admiration

than in pitying scorn. He resumed his leadership of the gang.

And the gang, seven months out of the year, really ruled the village of Savoy. Sheriff Steenrod, the sole peace officer in Savoy, save for a very old, rheumatic and deaf constable, was boss of the hardwood logging camp up Belle River; and the able-bodied men of Savoy followed him into the woods every fall. Each year the logging crew grew smaller. Savoy was sinking into decay as the hardwood cuttings grew less and less and economic necessity drove her men to the city. The farms were worked out.

It was almost incredible, the activity which Crutch Freeman developed, with the aid of his crutch. He could travel up a slippery mountain trail, sticking his steel-tipped crutch into the ice and rock crevices, as fast as a man with two good legs. He could hold and fire a light shotgun with one arm and down a deer. He could trail a trap line. He could swim as fast as ever. In a fight—and he was in many of them, for his experience seemed to have embittered him terribly—he used the crutch as a bludgeon and as a pike, stabbing at his opponent with the sharp tip. He did not scruple to use it viciously when necessary.

His tongue grew sharper. The teasing tendency he had shown as a boy developed into outright cruelty. Convalescing, he had got his first outdoor exercise by chasing frightened chickens about the dooryard, and, when he caught one, attaching sharp wooden spurs to its feet, so that it walked in comical circles, as the spurs stuck into the ground. He had taken two cats away from Mary Martin, tied their tails together, hung them over the end of his crutch and held the crutch out at arm's length in a display of strength and fiendish enjoyment, while the cats clawed and bit at each other in their agony. He used the crutch to kill ani-

mals he trapped. It was no wonder he was called Crutch Freeman.

The years passed, Samuel Burden, the elder, laid down his unbearable burden and died. His widow, her share of the farm swept away by the settlement, moved into the village to live with Mary Martin's mother, a widow too, and became a seamstress. Pinky Burden went to the city at the age of fifteen, looking for work. He found it, and a chance to get some schooling, too. A year later Mary Martin went to the city high school.

The seventh year came; and the annual harvest ball was in full swing again at the town hall. Or rather, it was in full hop, for the days of the swinging waltz and gliding polka had gone. Instead of the violin, guitar and organ for orchestra there was a trio of brass and drum that rattled out a rapid rhythm underneath the proscenium of festooned wheat and cornstalks, with red ears hanging down. The musicians were behind footlights of hollowed pumpkins, the eyes, ears, noses, and mouths of which were glaring with electric light instead of only smoking candles, as of old.

The hall was crowded. As a special effort to attract attendance, the occasion had been designated as a harvest-home ball. It was a sort of home-coming occasion. Savoy reached out its hands and begged its absent sons and daughters to come home. Many of them had come. Pinky Burden was there—and so was Mary Martin. Indeed, they danced together. The stag line was there, too. It was composed entirely of youths who had not gone away from home. Crutch Freeman leaned in a corner—his crutch hidden behind him, for once—and watched the dancers out of scornful little pale eyes that seemed lighter because of his dark face.

His remarks were particularly bit-

ing and savage to-night. It was the first time he had seen Mary Martin in four years, and the mousy, modest little girl had become a beauty. Crutch Freeman had pretended, seven years ago, that he did not want to dance. But he could have danced, then, had he wanted to badly enough. Now he wanted to seven times as badly, and he could not. He wanted to dance with Mary. Just why, he did not exactly know. He told himself it was his right to do so. Wasn't she his cousin?

Pinky Burden was dancing with her, Crutch kept his eyes on the couple. He felt of the slippery hard wood of his crutch, behind him.

"Well, there's a lot of come-homers, ain't they?" inquired Rusty Rourke, who was still Crutch's chief of staff, and who pretended that he did not care to dance. "About everybody—except Sam Burden."

"I just wish he was here for a minute," growled Freeman. "I'd learn him how to dance to a tune, the—"

His language was scorching. Rusty envied him his linguistic ability.

"I see Pinky's home," remarked Rusty.

"Yeah!" exploded Crutch. "I see he is."

Rusty refrained from mentioning Mary Martin. He knew better. He knew that Crutch had asked Mary to ride to the hall with him in his flivver. Crutch had learned to drive a car with the same reckless dash that he did everything, despite his maimed condition. A hole bored in the brake pedal fitted the steel peg in his crutch.

"He's pretty clever, dancin'," observed Rusty. "I notice they don't anybody seem to cut in on him when he don't want 'em to."

"I'd cut in on him if—" Crutch Freeman's voice seemed to choke in his throat. He breathed hard. He watched Pinky and Mary. He watched Mary's flying feet and her shapely legs, from

which the short skirts flew out as Pinky turned her. With those pretty feet she had *walked* to the ball with Pinky rather than ride with him, Crutch!

"Pinky thinks he's the sheik of Savoy," Crutch growled. "Pretty proud of his city style. Pretty boy, ain't he? Got a foot like a fairy and a complexion like a baby. I wish Sam—"

Rusty looked at Crutch's dark and twitching face and scowled. He had not seen Crutch so "riled up" in a long time. He felt something coming.

"The sheik of Savoy," Crutch mumbled again. "Well, he better tuck himself into his tent. He's rushin' Mary Martin too fast. He better watch his step. She's my cousin. I'd cut in—Say, Rusty, you can dance. I want you to cut in on them and shove Pinky over here where I can talk to him. I want to talk to him. Go ahead! Cut in on them."

Rusty pretended he didn't want to; but in reality he was glad to. The stag line was being broken frequently by the modern privilege of cutting in. That was one thing which made the harvest ball so popular in these latter days, when Savoy itself was actually losing population. So, when Pinky and his starry-eyed partner swung near, Rusty intruded himself roughly between them and shouldered Pinky toward Crutch Freeman.

Pinky did not seem to see Crutch. He stood with his back to Crutch and tried to look unconcerned at the rude interruption to his rhythmic bliss. Freeman reached out and touched Pinky with his crutch. The steel tip pricked him a little and he whirled, with an involuntary grimace of surprise which deepened as he saw Crutch's drawn and glowering face.

"I want to talk to you," Crutch gritted at him, through close-held jaws. "I want to talk to you. You keep your hands off Mary Martin. See? You leave her be. She's my cousin and

you keep your paddies off'n her, Pinky, or I'll puncture you with this."

He stabbed the steel spike into the floor close to Pinkey's foot. Pinky did not move—but he smiled. He met Crutch's malevolent glare and his threat with a smile.

"Look here, Perley," he said; "I don't know what you mean, at all. I don't know why you hold things against me. I never did anything to hurt you. And as far as Mary Martin is concerned—that's my own business, and hers. I brought her to the dance and I'm going to take her home. And I'm going to dance with her, too, in the meantime."

"You damn pink-faced boob!" cried Crutch. "Mamma's boy! You think nobody else would fetch her? You think nobody else would dance with her? You seem to think you're the sheik of Savoy. You think because you can dance you can fool around with any girl you want to, eh?"

Pinky's cheeks flamed violently. He did have a girlish complexion and a habit of flushing which he could not control and which annoyed him terribly. It made him angry now.

"I didn't say that and I don't mean it," he retorted. "Mary is no wall-flower."

"And I am, eh?" snapped Crutch. "And who made me one? It was a Burden, wasn't it? And Mary Martin is my cousin. You keep your hands off. I'll take her home, if I can't dance with her. She don't have to walk home with the likes of you—you—"

Pinky went a little pale, but it was not from the profanity with which Freeman addressed him. He had no fear of the cripple. He used to be bullied by Perley, but that was all past. He was a man, now, and despite those pink cheeks and those rather small feet and that slim waist, he was a powerful lad. From working the soil—the flinty, rocky and back-breaking soil—he had got his start and stamina. And he had

developed well. No, he was not afraid of Crutch. He felt sorry for him and he wanted no public argument and no fight.

"I'm goin' to cut in on you," Crutch went on, "even if I can't dance. I'll ride Mary home."

"She'll ride, but not with you, Crutch," Pinky retorted calmly: "I've hired a car."

"Oh, you did, eh? Well, you can fire it back, then. I said: 'You—keep—your—dirty—hands—off'n—my—cousin!'"

Pinky gave a gesture of hopeless disgust and turned away. He was flung back by a violent shove. Rusty Rourke, whirling Mary masterfully about the hall, had shouldered him. Pinky recovered quickly and caught a look of appeal in Mary's eyes. Rusty was holding her so tightly she could scarcely breathe, it seemed. He lifted her right off her feet at times. It was Rusty's way of showing his strength, his style of dancing, and it was not comfortable for a partner. Pinky knew that Mary wanted him to cut in. He started toward her; then he caught something out of the corner of his eye, and flung up his hand in time to ward off a vicious thrust from Freeman's crutch. He caught the shaft of the crutch in his hand and grabbed with the other and held it.

Freeman jerked and twisted but could not, to his surprise, get the crutch away, though he was expert at this sort of thing.

"Leggo of that!" he foamed, spluttering and raging.

"When I'm ready," answered Pinky, smiling. "Look here, Perley, I know what's half the matter with you. It's this ugly crutch. You have got to depend on it too much. You ought to get rid of it. It's the crutch that makes you so crotchety. It got you a nickname. You are trying to live up to it. Now you listen: I'm going to dance with

Mary. And she isn't much of a cousin to you, anyhow. You call her so, but I know all about it. I'm going to take her home too. And some time, when you'll listen to reason, I'll have something to tell you. It will do you good. Do you want me to take this crutch away from you?"

He twisted a little. Perley had one hand caught in the handle, and the strength of Pinky's twist caused him to wince. He snarled a half-threat, half-appeal; and Pinky let go and darted after Mary. He tapped Rusty on the shoulder. Rusty did not release her at once. He did a moment later, though—and stood looking down in surprise at white marks on his big red wrist, where Pinky's fingers had clamped down.

"He—he almost smothered me," Mary gasped. "What did Perley say to you?"

"Nothing much," Pinky answered, smiling—"nothing much."

"But I saw him try to hit you with that crutch—and try to stab your foot, too," she protested. "I saw his lips say, 'She's my cousin.' I've heard him say it before—too many times," she added. "He wanted me to—to go to the dance with him."

"I know. Oh, he just let me know how little he likes me," Pinky admitted. "I guess he thought I was afraid of him, because I am sorry for him."

"Let's go home."

"Would you rather walk home with me than ride with—"

"Oh, of course I would!"

"I can feel your heart beating, Mary."

He could feel her fingers tighten on his, too.

"Let's—go," she gasped, a breath to each word. "Now!"

"All right. And we won't have to walk, because I've got a car waiting, right across the street. We'll take a ride out the river road, Mary—the old river road."

"Quick!" she breathed in his ear.

Her intuition was just swift enough. Rusty Rourke had lunged toward the head of the stairs to intercept them. Pinky swung Mary past him, and they trotted down the stairs. Ten seconds later "Crutch" Freeman swung himself bodily over the rail, dropped his crutch to the bottom, let himself down as far as he could by his hands, dropped to the landing, snatched up his crutch and vaulted out of the door into the frosty, moonlit night.

The moon turned the dusty road to silver; and across the silvery band walked Pinky Burden and Mary Martin, arm in arm, toward a standing closed car. Crutch started after them. Then he whirled like a toy on a stick and loped toward his own flivver, parked close to the door of the hall. Rusty Rourke got into the seat beside him and five other youths packed themselves in the tonneau. They were ominously silent.

"Oh, hurry!" Mary begged, as Pinky tried the starter.

The engine was cold and the battery of the car none too strong. Crutch Freeman's flivver started at once and headed the same way Pinky's car was headed—toward the Belle River bridge.

"Go the other way," cried Mary. "I'm afraid!"

"They are going over the Alps road, to the cider mill," Pinky declared. "If we go the other way, we'd meet them on the Round Mountain road, coming back."

Pinky was thinking hard. He felt the threat of the silent gang, of Crutch's purposeful movements. He did not want to risk taking Mary into any place where Crutch might choose to stage an attack upon him, for he knew that Crutch would not hesitate to carry Mary off by main force, in the mood he had exhibited. And Pinky had something he wanted to say to Mary, out on the old river road, before he took her home.

"We'll go up the old river road and cut across home," he said. "They won't think of the cross-cut."

"All right," she answered, in a small voice. And her hand touched his, on the wheel.

The car started. It went down Main Street to the curve, before it struck the bridge. As the headlights swung about and focused on the abutment grade, Pinky jammed on the brakes. Across the abutment, close to the bridge, stood Crutch's flivver, with the owner standing up in the seat and with his gang ranged at each end of the car, in the road, to block the approach.

Pinky sensed his mistake the moment he applied the brakes, and stepped sharply on the gas. There was barely room to run past the rear end of the other car. He risked running through the fence and over the abutment wall, twenty feet above the water. He sensed greater danger in the gang that had ranged itself across the road to hold him up. His car gasped—choked—and the engine died. The car rolled to a stop within a few feet of Crutch's flivver; and would not respond to the starter.

Crutch Freeman vaulted to the ground and swung himself swiftly to the driver's door of the closed car. He jerked the door open.

"Get out of there, you—" He called Pinky by a fighting name.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Pinky, not stirring. "Have you gone crazy?"

"Mebbe I have." Crutch's eyes glittered, his voice seemed choked. "Mebbe I have—the way your brother did, once. He went crazy. He was rushin' a chippy and I said so and he went crazy. He kicked me into a cripple. Mebbe I'm crazy, now. Anyhow, you get out of there, away from Mary Martin. You come back from the city to be the sheik of Savoy and I don't stand for it. You think maybe you can make

the same thing out of her as Flossie Bird, eh? You're headed for a parkin' party up the river road. I know all about it. Get out of there!"

Mary gasped and tried to speak, but seemed unable to do so. Pinky gripped her hand hard and whispered: "Keep still. I'll take care of you—and of him. Keep quiet. Don't get out of the car, whatever happens."

He reached across her lap and turned the handle of the door, locking it, so that it could only be opened from inside. Then he got out from behind the wheel onto the running board, closing and deftly locking the door behind him, and faced Freeman.

"Look here, Crutch Freeman," he said, in a low tone. "You can't scare me. I am getting out because of Mary. You've got a gang with you, and I don't want to fight you, anyway. I don't want to have anything to do with you. You've had your revenge. Your family put my father in his grave; your gang drove Sam out of town; your family robbed my mother of a home. That's enough. I never held it against you, personally. I never did anything to harm you. But I am going to smash you if you don't get away and let us pass."

"The hell you are!"

With no further warning, Crutch swung his weapon up from the ground. It struck Pinky with sure aim, beside the head, and he lurched off the running board into the road. Mary screamed. Crutch beckoned to his gang.

Mary placed her hand on the horn button and kept it there, while the horn screeched. Crutch swore, jerked the hood up and with a single blow of that terrible crutch, silenced the alarm.

"Pick him up," he ordered of his satellites. "Take him down behind the willows. Fix him the way I said. Then bring him up here again. Pour some water over him. I want him to know what's happening to him, the—"

Swiftly and silently the six others did Freeman's bidding. Crutch watched them disappear behind thick willows thrust up on one side of the road. He wrenched at the handle of the door, and swore when it would not turn.

"Open that door!" he commanded Mary.

"No, no, I'll not open it," Mary cried, her voice shaking.

Crutch roared his command again and tore at the handle with futile rage. Apparently it did not occur to him to smash the glass. He continued to struggle with the door. Finally he stopped.

"Well, I guess you will open it," he promised, ominously; and raising his voice: "Hurry up there, you fellows! Fetch him up here."

A murmur of voices answered, and soon the six young ruffians appeared, two of them half carrying Pinky Burden between them. He was conscious, but his head hung forward. He had been gagged with a bandanna tied so tightly that he choked when he breathed. His left foot dragged. Mary saw his right leg as far as the knee; below that there was nothing. She moaned and pounded on the wind shield with her fists.

Crutch Freeman laughed, showing his teeth; laughed like a veritable maniac, and drowned out Mary's feeble cries.

"I'll learn him how it is to have only one leg," he said. "I'll learn him how to hop around. I'll make a bum sheik out of him."

"Oh, my God! What have you done?" moaned Mary.

"Open the door and take a closer look," suggested Crutch, laughing as if he would choke.

A gurgling sound came from Pinky's throat. He raised his head and shook it negatively at Mary.

"Come on, Crutch. Make it snappy!" urged Rusty Rourke. "The trooper from Alpena is due in a little while."

"You shut up and do your stuff,"

Crutch responded angrily. "The dirty louse locked the doors to this crate, damn him! Put the rope on his foot."

They lifted Pinky bodily off the ground and one of them stooped and slipped the noose of a rope around the left leg.

"Feeemy, you drive my car out of the road and hide it in the willows. The rest of you come and push this crate onto the bridge. Close to the rail, so she can see."

Pinky struggled. He fell into the dust, was jerked up, his arms twisted cruelly. Three of the gang combined their strength to roll the closed car onto the bridge and as close to the railing as they could get it. Crutch's flivver was, meanwhile, driven off the road into the hedge. Rusty and another dragged Pinky into the glare of the car's headlights and held him against the rail, facing it, his hands thrust high up his back.

"You goin' to open that door?" Crutch demanded of Mary.

Again Pinky shook his head at her, violently. Mary prayed, her fists clenched. She did not move to open the door. Crutch gave a signal. Pinky was lifted so that the upper part of his body pitched forward over the rail. Suddenly he was allowed to drop, head down.

Mary shrieked and opened the door —on the right side. It struck the rail, leaving an open space of only five or six inches.

"Never mind, now." Crutch shouted at her, in a paroxysm of fiendish delight at the predicament he saw her in "Never mind! We'll fetch him up again, so's you can see him. Party boy, ain't he, with only one leg? Nice danc'er! Reg'lar sheik! We'll let you see how he dances with his head down."

His voice held a note of insane glee. He seemed ferociously pleased with his fiendish ingenuity. In the midst of her horrible fear, Mary remembered

the time he had tortured her kittens. It was the same sort of game. She pressed her face against the glass, then thrust her head out the narrow opening and stared down over the rail into the blackness, lighted only by gleams of light on the river. The water was deep and swift. Some old piers from an ancient bridge had been left when the new one was built and they narrowed the channel so that the river coursed through speedily. She could not tell whether Pinky had been let down into the water or not. She saw the rope slowly paid out from the hands of the two who held it.

Suddenly she flung and twisted her little body and, by a near miracle, managed to squeeze herself out of the car. Unmindful of bruises, she gripped the railing to climb over it.

Crutch saw her maneuver and yelled to his gang to stop her. She got hold of the rope and, standing astride the rail, her feet on the lower bar, tried to haul Pinky up. It was too much for her. Rusty Rourke made for her, grabbed at her arm. She dodged and slid down outside the rail, hung by the edge of the bridge floor, twisted her legs about the rope, and slid down to the water.

As she struck the river she heard Pinky gurgling and choking, and felt slack in the rope. Her weight, added to Pinky's had been too much for the single youth left holding the rope when Rusty let go to grab at Mary. Mary fumbled at the noose around Pinky's ankle—and somehow got it off.

She struggled blindly in the water, for a moment, until she felt Pinky beside her—felt him swimming. His arms had been left free, luckily. She swam well herself, and she kept beside him—thinking of that shortened leg, choking from horror, wondering how he could live, how he could move. Wondering also, why she did not faint away and drown.

They moved with the current and went under the bridge. Mary's hand struck the wood of an old crib. She clung to it, pulled Pinky to it, and got his hands upon it. Then she tore the gagging bandanna from his face, and whispered quickly in his ear:

"Hush! Not a sound!"

He swallowed painfully; obeyed her. She kissed his wet cheek, and tears came from her eyes.

Above them sudden panic had developed.

"By God, they're both gone!" rasped the voice of Rusty Rourke. "They've gone—in the river. Let's git away from here!"

Crutch Freeman's voice, harsh and treble with anger, answered:

"The first man tries to run I'll stick him in the belly with this," he threatened. "Catch hold of that damn crate of theirs and roll her back and over the wall into the river."

The gang obeyed him. The car came hurtling and splashing into the water.

"That'll tell the story—the one we want told," Crutch growled, triumphantly.

Came the sound of his crutch tapping on the planks, then onto the road, the sound of running feet—then a long silence.

"We can go ashore now," whispered Pinky.

"How can you stand it?" whispered Mary, brokenly. "What did they do—to your leg?"

"Trussed it up behind me," answered Pinky, half laughing. "So tight I can't move it. But I can swim all right."

"Oh! Oh!" Mary fainted.

The cold water revived her very soon; and she was more than revived by Pinky's fervent kisses.

"All right now?" he asked. "Maybe you can untie this rope."

Her fingers trembled, but she used her teeth, too, and soon Pinky's leg was free—and whole and sound. He

helped her get to shore, less than twenty feet away.

Hand in hand they scrambled up the bank. They came out where Crutch Freeman's flivver stood, stalled in the mud. And there was Crutch, feverishly trying to force it out. His gang had deserted him.

The appearance of the pair, dripping from every thread, in the glare of his headlights, seemed to turn Crutch Freeman to stone. Pinky went up to him and took his crutch away. Freeman made no resistance at all. Pinky flung the crutch over the willows into the river.

"You say my brother's kick made you a cripple," Pinky said sternly. "It was your *tongue* that did it—your meanness. I think I know how to cure you. I'm going to turn you loose—without your crutch."

*Look for another Clay Perry story in these pages soon.*



#### A NEW ENDURANCE RECORD

WHY marvel at the performance of Joie Ray in marathon races, or the couples who danced four hundred and sixty hours, or the boys who finished Pyle's bunion derby, or the midwest tank who drank a hundred and one cups of coffee on a bet? Here's a record which puts all that in the shade of mediocrity.

In Washington, when Congress is in session, Wednesday is "Cabinet Day," when the wives of the members of the cabinet and the wife of the vice president, nine in all, give public receptions from four to six or thereabouts and provide all comers with tea and the appropriate delicacies.

There are women in Washington who, hungry for social recognition and not often invited to the drawing-rooms of the great, go to each one of these nine receptions. They rush from house to house, shake each hostess' hand, imbibe oceans of tea, parade past the society reporters and proudly seek out any of their acquaintances who happen to be present.

The man who thinks marathon racing is a great physical feat ought to put in an afternoon trying to call, inside of two hours, on nine different hostesses, drinking tea and eating cake at each stop. If, at the end of the stunt, he's not a shivering, whimpering, back-broken wreck, he is in shape to enter Pyle's next transcontinental race.

"But I can't walk, then," Freeman said, in a small voice.

"I'm going to see that you do walk," Pinky answered. "Like a man on two good legs. I'm going to buy you a leg. A good one. You've been using that crutch to keep you sour on the world. You've been using it for a weapon—a dangerous weapon. It's hurt you, yourself, more than anybody else. You and your gang can pay for the car you shoved into the river. I'll pay for the new leg."

"As for Mary—Mary and I are going to be married. Aren't we, dear?" he added.

"Oh—yes!"—in two gasps.

Crutch Freeman cut in at the next harvest ball. Or rather, Perley Freeman did. He even learned to dance a little.

# RODEO ~

By  
**B. M. Bower**

*Who wrote "Points West," Etc.*

In Four Parts—Part IV

The superhuman grit and  
skill of a young rider!



## CHAPTER XVII—(*Continued.*)

PUBLICITY AND PICTURES.

**A**NDY was busily placing the men for the camera as they came up in response to Tex's request. "This is about all, I guess," Tex observed.

"I thought I saw those Laramie boys around here, a little while ago," Andy replied, glancing along the fence at the riders and men afoot. "I wonder if the Kid would mind riding that sorrel out here for a few minutes. He's here somewhere, isn't he?"

"Yeah, he's in the stables," Tex told him. "What's the trouble between him and you folks, Green?" He took the time to light his cigar. "I didn't know you was even acquainted."

"Did he say there was trouble between us?" Andy glanced at the other members of the Happy Family who were standing near.

"Well," said Tex in his drawling voice, "he gave me a message to deliver, and I ain't sure it's going to do any good to anybody. I hate to be talkin' in the dark—"

"What was it, Tex? It may not do any good, but it can't do any harm, either. What did he say?"

"Well, I told him and them other blue shirts to come on over here, that you wanted to use 'em in a picture, and the Kid said you could go to hell, and to tell you if you ever come near him he would—"

"I guess we understand," Andy said, with a short laugh. "It sounds about like the Kid. He's all pooched out over the publicity he's getting, I suppose. Well, you can tell him we don't want to ruin any film and we'd like him to stay off the lot. Some day," Andy predicted with contemptuous emphasis, "that boy's going to bust. If that conceit of his ever starts working, he'll

blow up like a still with the cooling pipe clogged."

"You know him, do you?" Tex's black eyes widened with surprise.

"Know him? Say, I hate to peddle bad news, but that's Chip's boy! Used to be a regular kid, but they sent him to college and he's turned out to be the damnedest—"

"Chip? Chip Bennett?" Tex took his cigar from his mouth and looked it over gravely. "That's who he looks like, come to think of it. I knew he was a dead ringer for somebody, but Chip's dressed different and wears a small hat, and I couldn't seem to place the Kid. What's the trouble between him and his folks? He come here alone—rode all the way from Montana—and he never let on who he was. Entered as Montana Kid. Seems funny."

"Ashamed of his folks, maybe; but he ain't half as ashamed as they are of him—or oughta be!" snapped Pink. "Wouldn't speak to me yesterday. Passed us up like—like—" Pink's voice trailed off into muttering.

"Seems a nice, quiet boy, I thought." Tex looked from one to the other in puzzled questioning. "Too quiet. I set him down as bashful and sensitive, maybe. He sure is a hummer, though, when he gets on a horse. If that boy keeps on like he's started, he'll have the world's championship in another year or two. I should think Chip Bennett would be proud of a boy like him; I know I would."

If the Happy Family felt a rebuke in Tex's words they gave no sign. Andy Green grunted and pulled a dog-eared script from his pocket, frowning as he scanned page after page. Whether he was conscious of the typed words is a question only Andy himself could answer. The Native Son, called "Luis" by his friends for professional reasons when others were near, signaled languidly to the assistant director, who hurried up with a hand mirror into

which the Native Son scowled, unseeingly retouching his make-up.

"Bashful and sensitive!" gritted Pink, close beside him. "If he's bashful, I'm a perfect lady!"

"He's a rider, though," Weary reminded them, a troubled look in his eyes as he stared out across the arena. "Tex is right about that. He's so much like Chip used to be, it—damn it, it kind of gets me when I see him going up against these champs alone. He—we ought to be backin' him, damn it! Chip's kid—and not one of the bunch willing to give him a good word or a pat on the back—I tell yuh, boys, it ain't right!"

"Pats on the back's what ails him, Weary," the Native Son said slowly. "Nobody hates this condition of things worse than I do, but I don't see how it's going to be helped when the Kid turns us down cold, the way he does."

"All right, Luis!" Andy called sharply. "You boys get on your horses and be ready to pick up the action when Luis has made his ride. But keep outside the scene, all of you, till I give the word. This horse is going to do straight, forward bucking, they tell me—easy to ride but showy. I want to get all of it I can. And Luis," he added, coming closer and lowering his voice, "Tex ain't going to stand over you with a club and make you muffle your spurs. I looked this horse over, and he struck me as being an old crow hopper."

"You want a little action, eh?"

"That's the idea, Mig. It's asking a lot of Tex to use his stock this way, when he's got a whole week of two contests a day. I've got a suspicion he's givin' you a cowgirl's bronc. One of the easy ones."

"Leave it to me, Andy." The Native Son smiled his slow smile, the one that photographed so well. "The way I feel right now, it's action I want and lots of it. You'll get a bucking scene, don't worry."

"Well, don't advertise them spurs. But if you forget the contest rule here, I won't wire in to have you fired. And you know, Mig, I don't want to pay for the horse, either!"

"Did you ever know of my cutting up a horse with spurs?" The Native Son frowned. "I know the story and I know the kind of a ride this scene calls for. That's the kind you're going to get, unless the old skate lays down with me."

The Little Doctor, Chip, the Old Man and Boy, with Dulcie Harlan and her father following a few paces behind, appeared suddenly at the little gate beside the chutes.

"Here's your audience, Andy," the Little Doctor called in her clear treble. "We want to see it all without being seen, so where shall we sit?"

Delay followed their coming, while Andy established the group where they would be sure to see all that was going on, and chatted with the Old Man about his rheumatism, which was better—so much so that the Old Man was walking with a cane and the help of some one's sustaining arm—and with the Little Doctor about the scenes they were going to shoot that morning, and with Chip who had refused to borrow a cowboy costume and ride with the others.

You would think, to see him, that he knew Joshua's technique of making the sun stand still, and would apply it after a while. But that is the way with movie directors—harried to death but never hurried, however much they may pretend to be.

It took Boy to jar Andy loose and start him to work on the scene.

"Say, Andy, there was a big, long piece in the paper about the Kid catchin' a robber—"

"Yeah, I saw it," Andy broke in hastily. "Well, the light is just about right, now—I've got to go and make Mig earn his salary. You folks will

have lunch with us, won't you? I've got it ordered at a good place uptown; we'll eat at noon and get right down here for the afternoon show. Going to shoot some regular contest scenes."

He gave Boy a quick, admonitory glance—wholly wasted—and lifted his megaphone to his mouth.

"All right, folks, we're going to make this without any rehearsal. Outa the scene, everybody! Ready there at the chutes?" He was walking toward the camera all the while he was speaking, and now he stood critically surveying the spot where Luis Mendoza—for the moment not the Native Son—would come hurtling forth from the shallow pen when the gate upon which he now sat was thrown open.

"All right, Luis! Head him straight out and down the field, if you can."

"Say, is this rocking horse broke to neck rein?" retorted the Native Son, grinning as he let himself down into the saddle, removed his hat and shook back his heavy mane of hair.

"All right?" questioned Andy through the megaphone.

"All right," called the Native Son.

"Gray, I want you to get the gate swinging open, showing Luis on the horse, inside. Open the gate—camera!"

The big bay seemed ready to sulk and refused to come forth, but the Native Son pricked him smartly with the spurs and the horse—they called him Walloper, by the way—stood on his hind feet and came out with a lunge.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### "BUT I'M NOT WHIPPED!"

ONCE before in his life Andy misjudged a horse and paid for the mistake in some bitterness. Now he saw how he had erred in his judgment of both Tex and the horse.

Tex had not palmed off any half-hearted bucker on Luis Mendoza and his director, and the Walloper did not

require uncovered steel to induce him to perform. The one thing he did do nicely was to run straight out into the field.

He seemed to be an intermittent performer. Three good, high jumps he made straight into the foreground. Then he stopped and stood like a statue until he felt the prick of the spurs, when he hurled himself straight into the air, came down stiff-legged and started running.

Now and then he interrupted himself long enough to buck petulantly, and it was those interruptions which kept up Andy's hopes of a good scene. He did not send any one after his leading man as quickly as he would otherwise have done, so the horse may be blamed for what followed.

The Kid, seeing a bunch of people up around the chutes, was keeping himself and his pupil as far down toward the lower end of the field as possible. He did not want to encounter any newspaper reporters and their cameras, chiefly because he did not want to do murder if he could avoid it.

Incidentally, and so as not to attract their attention, he had changed his blue shirt for one of neutral hue—a gray broadcloth which he had worn on the trail. By special request his Laramie boys had also put away the famous blue satin, though it pained them to do so.

They were therefore inconspicuous and attending very strictly to their own affairs—which on the part of the Laramie boys consisted of sitting in a row alongside the fence, watching Joella Germain do the revised crawl under the neck of her horse.

Midway across the arena the Kid had stopped her and, on Blazes—since he was saving Stardust for the race that afternoon—proceeded to crawl slowly and deliberately around his horse's neck, explaining the why and the wherefore of every move he made. Joella watched him, careful to miss no move.

"Now, you try it with your horse standing still," he commanded. "Once you get the hang of it, you'll find it's easier than the way you do it."

The Kid had his back to the arena. He did not see the Walloper coming until the thud of hoofbeats made him turn to look. He was none too soon, for the bay horse was bearing down upon Joella with the staring, white-rimmed eyeballs a horse usually shows when he is in a frenzy of fear or anger—it doesn't matter much which.

Luckily the Kid had been fooling with his rope while he talked with Joella a few minutes before, and had hung the coil over the saddle horn. He snatched it up, shook out his loop as he whirled to meet the runaway, saw that the horse did not mean to swing away from him, and flung the noose straight for his head.

He was just in time. As he took his turns and Blazes settled back, the Walloper was within ten feet of Joella's phlegmatic little gray pony.

"What do you think you're doing?" cried the Kid, with all the injustice of angry youth. "I told you you needed a double, Mig!"

"Go to the devil!" snapped the Native Son, yanking at the halter rope which was his only means of controlling the bay—and that little better than nothing, as every bronc rider knows. "Take off your rope! Nobody asked you to butt in on this."

"Better get off, before you fall off!" jeered the Kid.

"Take off that rope, or I'll hand you a punch in the jaw!" warned the Native Son with a jerky harshness of manner, because the Walloper was at last doing the "walking-beam" kind of bucking which Tex had guaranteed.

"Better wait and see how you feel when you pick yourself up," the Kid advised, for the first time in years thoroughly enjoying himself with the Native Son. Joella, it may here be ex-

plained, had made haste to gallop back to the fence out of the way, and incidentally out of hearing.

Seeing her gone, the Native Son called the Kid a name he could not have spoken in Joella's presence.

The Kid replied in the same spirit and vocabulary.

"You sure have got a licking coming to you!" declared the Native Son rather breathlessly, wondering if the darned horse was going to buck till noon.

"The way I'll knock the paint off you will be just too bad!" retorted the Kid, as Weary and Pink came galloping swiftly down upon them.

Afterward the Kid remembered how dexterously the two pocketed the bucking horse between them, and how lightly the Native Son swung over the rump of Weary's horse and to the ground.

"Get on behind, Mig, and I'll take you back," Weary said, looking around surprisedly. "No use walking."

The Native Son shook his head, advancing upon the Kid who was coiling his rope, his hat brim hiding his face.

"Well, get down and take your licking," he said, with ominous calm. "You're so full of brag, now back it up."

"Seems a shame to strike an old man," taunted the Kid remorselessly, looking down at him. "Be your age, grandpa!"

Now, the Native Son had just passed forty, and though he neither looked, felt nor acted middle-aged, the thrust went home. His heavily made-up eyelids closed to slits through which his eyes gleamed like flames.

It was the look which made small boys squirm in the front rows of movie theaters, along about the third reel of a Luis Mendoza super-special; the look that thrilled young women of high-school age and beyond and impelled them to buy Luis Mendoza's photographs to stand on their dressing tables.

It gave the Kid an inexplicable thrill as he stared down into that narrowed gaze; not fear, but rather that thrill of pleasurable excitement which comes when an adventurous youth comes face to face with danger.

For one moment the Kid felt as he did when he eased into the saddle and felt a bronc's muscles quiver for the first lunge of the battle to come; then the Native Son reached up and gripped him. The Kid struck fiercely, ineffectively, and came down fighting, still held in that inexorable grasp.

Walt, Beck and Billy came running, but dared not interfere. Those two, evenly matched in all save experience, somehow revealed an inner struggle which concerned no man save themselves. It showed in their eyes, in the set of their tight-lipped mouths. The Laramie boys looked on helplessly and with a feeling of bewilderment.

The Kid had never mentioned Luis Mendoza, never intimated that he knew him. What, then, were they fighting about? Why were they staring eye to eye like that, trying to look each other down? But Pink and Weary knew, though they could not have put the mental conflict into words. Youth and maturity striving for supremacy—they couldn't express it, though they recognized what lay behind the quarrel.

It was not a bloody fight, nor a long on. The Kid had never gone in for fighting, though he had boxed a little in the gym. Luis Mendoza, however, was rather famous for his whirlwind battles as portrayed on the screen. Never a super-special without its fight scene wherein the hero threw men and furniture helter-skelter about the set, emerging from the mêlée minus half his shirt and with his heavy mop of brown hair, which he wore long for the purpose, dangling to his eyebrows; battered but victorious and smiling his slow smile as he gazed upon the havoc he had wrought.

The Kid's scornful "Be your age, grandpa!" had turned loose the whirlwind upon himself and he was wholly unprepared to meet it. Yet the Native Son did not want to hurt him overmuch, except in his self-esteem. He did not close the Kid's blazing eyes—how could he strike his fist against eyes so like Chip's in all save the color? Nor did he puff the Kid's lips with a blow he might easily have delivered—those lips which had a Little Doctor curve when they smiled!

He did worse, in a way. He held the Kid off at arm's length and slapped him soundly, first on one cheek, then on the other, dispassionately and with a look on his face which his movie fans would have adored. He did it so swiftly that the Kid could not seem to organize his own campaign of annihilation—though he tried hard enough.

"You may be hell on a horse," the Native Son told him between smacks, "but you're just an ornery kid that needs a good spanking. Your mother oughta turn you over her knee and paddle you good! Now will you behave? Will you own you're cleaned, and cleaned right?"

Tears of rage stood in the Kid's heavy-lashed eyes. He made one last ineffectual attempt to plant his fist in the Native Son's face, and dropped his hands to his sides. It took moral strength to do that, and Weary, at least, recognized the fact with softened gaze.

"No! I own you're a fighter and I'm not—you've got me stopped, damn you! But I'm not whipped! Some day I'll show you—all of you—dad, too—that I'm not"—his jaws came hard together for a second to steady a dangerous trembling—"not the complete washout you all seem to think!" he finished with bitter vehemence as he turned away, mounted slowly with all the spirit and easy grace gone from his movements, and rode off toward the stables.

"Gosh, I hated to do that!" the Na-

tive Son muttered into Weary's ear as they rode back to the chutes, meeting the crowd that had somewhat tardily awakened to the fact that something not in the script was being enacted down there, and had started down to see what it was.

Weary did not answer. He was thinking of that last remark of the Kid's, wondering just what he had meant. Perhaps the key to the whole sorry mess lay right there. Perhaps the Kid—

"You let him off easier than I would have done," Pink half reproved the Native Son, riding alongside. "I'd have laid him out cold if he'd said to me what he said to you."

"Oh, kids of his age are always kind of goofy on some things. I can remember when I looked on a man past thirty as having one foot in the grave. He's learned something this morning he would never get in college—"

"Oh, sign off, you fellows!" snarled Weary, the sunny tempered. "I'm getting darn sick of everybody romping on the Kid just because he lacks the outlook of us old roughnecks. I don't want to hear any more about the Kid."

"All right, go pat him on the head and tell him he's a wonder!" snapped Pink, and galloped on ahead of the heavily burdened horse Weary and the Native Son bestrode.

Yet when Andy hailed him and asked what was the matter, down there, Pink said nothing much was the matter, but Luis called down the fellow that roped his bronc, and that was all.

Dulcie Harlan, sitting just above them with a pair of splendid opera glasses in her hand, opened her mouth in complete amazement while she stared wide eyed at Pink. But she did not say a word, even when Boy declared that he bet that was the Kid down there, because the horse looked like Blazes.

She did not say anything, either, when the Little Doctor wondered aloud

where Claude was that morning. She wanted to ask him, she said, whatever possessed him to tell such an outrageous story to the newspaper people.

Among the badge-bedecked, big-hatted men loitering near her, Montana Kid seemed to share equally with Luis Mendoza the honors; the more heated arguments were about the Kid and his exploit with the bandit, his record in the arena, his affectation in the matter of shirts.

A good many of the remarks that reached Dulcie's alert ears were distinctly unfriendly. The Kid's aloofness was not going unnoticed, she gathered. Some one suddenly raised his voice to declare: "That boy shore hates himself, what I mean!" She also heard sneering references to "them college champeens," and vague predictions that they'd be late for school if they had to walk back.

Presently, when it began to look as though the movie people were in for one of those long intervals when no one seems to be doing anything whatever, Miss Dulcie Harlan left her place of vantage and made her way thoughtfully to the office.

Would Miss Gray please show her the list of contestants? There was a name she wanted to look up. She studied the list frowningly, giving especial attention to the events. Finally she placed her finger tip upon a certain name and laughed.

"If that isn't a synthetic flavor for you! Joella Germain! Did you get that, Miss Gray? I'll bet she spent days and days thinking that up. I noticed her trying to do her stuff—she's an awful mess, really. I don't see how she ever got in." She lifted her finger and studied the name again. "Joella Germain, Missoula, Montana," she read aloud. "It ought to be said on a saxophone. Just where is this Missoula, anyway?"

Miss Gray confessed that she did not

know, exactly; out on the plains somewhere, she thought.

"Not that it matters," said Dulcie, closing the book. "It's such a jazzy combination, and the girl is so terrible, one can't help noticing, is all."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A GIRL'S WRITING.

SO the incident passed and left scarcely a ripple on the surface, though the pebble of conscious reaction to it remained in the minds of many there.

Probably no one person there was the object of so much conflicting thought and emotion as the Kid, though his name was not mentioned by any one save strangers.

Weary's demand had closed the conversational door with a bang, so far as the Happy Family were concerned, and neither Chip nor the Little Doctor wanted to open it just then.

But none of these things reached the Kid just then. The Kid had slipped away from the boys and was lying full length in the loose hay back where the light was dim.

His face was hidden upon his folded arms and he was wrestling with that agony of shame which to the proud is worse than death; that terrible sense of defeat which a youth feels himself hated where he would be loved; spurned with contempt where he would be understood and appreciated for his purpose if not for its faulty realization.

The Happy Family had *not* changed. He knew it now beyond all possible doubt. That iron grasp of the Native Son's—he had felt it as inexorable as when he was twelve and Mig grabbed him and held him while he administered a playful paddling.

Those two, Weary and Pink, bearing swiftly down upon them, getting the bronc between them with no fuss at all, not a false motion anywhere; the

Native Son pulling his feet from the stirrups, throwing a limber leg over the rump of Weary's horse, twisting his slim body sidewise out of the saddle, sliding to the ground so easily—just as if he crawled off broncs every day of his life.

The Kid was no fool. He knew a master when he saw one. They were his kind. They could still join, if they chose, the sport he loved with every fiber of his being. The way Mig had sat and cussed him out while that bay devil bucked—never giving a thought to the horse, it seemed, but thinking only of his anger.

His bunch; the same old boys he had worshiped all his life. Yesterday when he saw them come riding down through the stable, he had felt that it was so. But then they had merely looked the same as he remembered them. This was different.

This was the bunch in action, the way they used to ride broncs at the Flying U, when the Kid was so little they were afraid to let him perch alone on the top rail of the corral; afraid he would fall off and get hurt. However busy they were, however excited, however hurried, some one of them always remembered to keep an eye on the Kid; always—always!

He hadn't appreciated that watchfulness then. He had hated the way they plucked him back from danger. They thought he was just a baby and couldn't take care of himself. Now, he knew they had loved him. They hadn't said so. They were always bossing him around, threatening to paddle his pants, sending him to the house, yelling at him not to do this and for gosh sake to cut that out. But they had loved him.

Therein lay the tragedy of to-day. He had looked straight down into the Native Son's eyes and had read there—hate? The Kid in his misery believed so. A cold, malevolent hatred that had crumpled along the Kid's nerves like an

electric shock. Even the humiliation of being slapped in the face again and again—with Walt and Billy and Beck looking on!—was dwarfed beneath the cataclysmic conviction that they *hated* him.

Weary and Pink had sat there on their horses and never spoke a word to him. But could he wonder at that? For what concerned one concerned them all. They had heard what he said to the Native Son; it was as if he had said it to them, too. Mig had not even bothered to fight him like a man! Mig had just held him off and slapped him.

Well, the Kid knew he had deserved it. He did not try to fool himself there. He deserved to have them despise him. He had acted like a boob all along, thinking the Happy Family had changed or ever would change! He ought to have had more brains.

What he wanted to do—or what for a time he thought he wanted to do—was to take his horses and disappear with a baffling suddenness which would always remain an impenetrable mystery to all who knew him. He wanted to go so far not one of them would ever hear of him again.

He thought longingly of South America or South Africa and wished there was a way of getting out of the stadium unseen—getting out with the horses; that is. Impossible, of course, but he might leave a note, giving a horse to each one of the boys—Stardust to Walt—he could go on and finish the relay race, maybe—

A childish mood, perhaps. At any rate it passed and left him listlessly aware of his responsibility to his team, his obligation to his own manhood. Quit now, because the Native Son had slapped his jaw? The Kid involuntarily drew up one knee and kicked his leg straight again, physically repelling the thought. No, he'd go on. He couldn't betray his team—nor himself, for that matter. He couldn't let the Happy

Family nod and say they knew all along he was a quitter.

The Kid sat up, staring gloomily at the gray wall beside him. Something began to nag at him; something he had said and forgotten when he plunged into the abyss. He was going to prove to them all that he wasn't a failure, a false alarm.

It would mean going out there and facing that laughing, jeering multitude day after day—the Kid winced at the thought—but he'd have to do it. He would if he had any spirit.

Walt and Billy and Beck, coming to find him and get him on his fighting feet again, looked at one another shakely when they saw the gray hardness of his face. Then Walt—who had been yell leader last year—jerked his head in a signal prepared five minutes before.

"Kid—Bennett! Rah! Rah! Rah!"

To be sure, the rooters were only three, but they had good lungs and they burred the last "Rah!" beautifully, and not without effect.

"Ah, dry up!" growled the Kid. But he got up and brushed the hay off his breeches, and the light began to come back in his eyes. "Who said I was out?"

"Yes, we are collegiate!" bawled a raucous voice derisively, somewhere among the horses. "Do your crowin' now, you roosters—there won't be nothin' left but feathers when the finals are called!"

"Yah—now *I'll* tell one!" the Kid retorted spiritedly. "And listen, funny lookin', I'll tell it at the finals. Try and be there—it'll be good!"

"Attaboy!" Walt grinned. "We're just gettin' started, and there's nothin' on earth can stop us. Eh, Kid?"

"Say, you'll bust the buttons off them blue shirts if yuh pooch yourselves out any more," yelled the unseen humorist. "Mail-order champeens! Six bits per dozen! Comes in blue—and yella!"

"Yes, they told us the yellow was out of stock; they said a bunch of you guys had the yellow, and were saving it for the finals," said the Kid, peering here and there to see who the fellow was.

The reply to that was chiefly prophetic of dire failure for all college men, but there was so great a percentage of conventional and uninteresting profanity in the remarks that the Kid merely shrugged his shoulders and yielded to Walt's importunities that they go and eat.

A lunch wagon, parked beside the south gate where the Kid had first entered the place, lured them with its white immaculateness. They lunched satisfyingly on bread and milk, with the cream showing thick and yellow in the top of the bottles.

The Kid's mood swung back to normal. He could discuss plans again with the boys, add his hopeful guess to their optimistic estimates of the money they would win that day. He could even forget, for moments at a time, the humiliations of the morning, and his dread of being stared at by strangers. They must wear their blue shirts, regardless of the attention they would attract. He saw that now.

Walt was right; they couldn't afford to let any one turn them off the trail they had chosen to travel. They were the first small beginning of a pioneer contest team. If they weakened in one detail, they might as well throw up the whole thing and quit.

So they returned to quarters and dressed in their blaring best, with freshly shaven faces, freshly brushed hats, freshly polished riding boots. Because they caught disparaging phrases as they passed lounging groups of riders, they walked with a slight swagger as if to say to this small, tense world that they knew they were good—they admitted it.

It was the kind of influence the Kid needed to stiffen his pride and his de-

termination to win in spite of everything; but when he went to saddle Blazes for the grand entry, he found a twist of paper tucked under the halter buckle where he could not fail to discover it. His fingers fumbled a little with eagerness to see what it was—and if he told you he didn't feel his heart jump in his chest, he would not be telling the truth, that's all. He turned his back upon possible spying and unwound the rumpled twist. And this is what was written:

Don't let them get your goat—go on and show them you've got the stuff.

It was a girl's writing, of course. No man would go that way about it. A man could walk up and clap him on the shoulder and say it. The Kid studied the penciled scribble, his lip between his teeth. Who was it? Joella Germain? She seemed to like him quite a lot. One of the other cowgirls who flung him a smile or a word, as they went hurrying here and there on errands of vast importance? But most of them were married and bore themselves circumspectly as young matrons should, whether they wore chaps or silks.

If it had been some dirty dig—a slap of sarcasm, he thought, he'd know it was that darn Dulcie Harlan. The writing looked about like her. But she'd never go out of her way to cheer a fellow up; not so you could notice it! Must be Joella. Nice little thing—Joella.

But the Kid did not thrill to the thought. He came near tearing the note up and scattering it among the bedding, but he folded it into as small a compass as he could and buttoned it into his shirt pocket instead.

Joella, of course. Nice kid, Joella. But somehow he still didn't thrill to the thought of her friendliness.

He ought to find her and thank her; let her know he had got the note all

right and was grateful for her good fellowship. He could hunt her up before the grand entry got under way. That much was due her as a matter of courtesy. But he didn't make any attempt to find her, and when he did see her riding out to take her place in the parade, he did not hurry to overtake her. After all, maybe she didn't write it. Maybe— The Kid did not attempt to finish the conjecture.

## CHAPTER XX.

### MORE MYSTERIOUS NOTES.

THAT day, by sheer dogged determination, the Kid ran first again in the relay race; first, because his horses behaved perfectly in station; first, because they never failed to turn in and stop abruptly in one or two stiff-legged jumps; first, because the Kid timed his saddle change and remounting to the fraction of a second and, with such horses, never varied.

But it was a close shave, at that. The fellow with the black and the pinto came in second, his horses a shade faster than the Kid's but nervous in station and not so accurate in turning in. They ran by a little. They tried to lunge away when the saddle was flung on their backs. Not much—better than most of the others, but enough.

Beck, with nothing to do during the relay but watch and pray, told the boys in detail exactly how each string performed.

"It's clockwork, the way you ride, Kid," he said. "Folks are beginning to talk about it. Boobs that don't know anything about riding—they can see how slick you handle it. Don't you let that clock run down, what I mean. One bobble, and that Oklahoma boy has got you stopped."

"Barring accidents—some horse bumping me, maybe—there isn't going to be any bobble," said the Kid. "I know what I'm up against."

"No, you don't," Beck contradicted. "You keep your eye peeled for 'Slim' Adley—follow with the gray and the sorrel. He's not in the money, so far; just running on a gamble some of you'll have bad luck. He's a dirty rider, Kid. Crowds 'em whea he doesn't need to. And he's thick with Carlos Baird—that fast guy. I wouldn't put it past 'em to frame you."

"I'm watching them all," the Kid assured him. "If they get close, I do. The ponies are wise, too. No horse is going to do any shoving, far as they're concerned. You notice how they duck in, don't you?"

"Yes, it's clockwork—and you keep that clock running on time, Kid!"

The Kid nodded, well pleased with the excellent teamwork his boys were showing. When one was contesting, the others were watching out for his interests, ready to give advice or warning if they thought it was needed. It seemed to him a splendid idea to pool their interests. His faith in the team idea grew apace. It ought to work. *It would work.*

That second day bore him out in his belief, for among the four they managed to get "in the money" in every event they entered. The Kid won a hundred dollars with his rope and Blazes, and got second money on his bronc riding.

Walt won third. In the steer wrestling he stood first for the two performances. Billy and Beck came trailing in behind, but they had something to show for their day's work, and they were correspondingly jubilant.

The Kid still held a large share of the crowd's attention, and that he tried to ignore. The judges watched him closer than they did some of the others, it seemed to him—and that put him on his mettle, keyed him up to make no slip. Everybody watched him. He felt as if he were performing under a microscope. They knew him by name—by his contest name, that is—and when

he rode out to rope or to ride they yelled at him and told him, some of them, to keep his shirt on.

The Kid hated the notoriety, but he refused to be distracted. His year on the varsity football team helped him now. But he hated it just the same, and perversely wished that the crowd would stay at home if they couldn't keep their mouths shut.

The third day was much like the second; and the next and the next. The grind began to tell on men and horses alike. Day after day the colorful grand entry, flags swaying at the head of the column, rodeo pennants whipping in the breeze, the amplifiers sending "The Stars and Stripes Forever" blaring in from all sides of the great stadium, until the air vibrated with the martial strains and human pulses leaped in response.

Day after day the ranks of the contestants thinned—a man hurt and carried away in the black ambulance that stood always waiting just under cover of the eastern tunnel, like a trapdoor spider peering out from its retreat, waiting and watching for the unwary fly; a man disqualified for breaking the rules, which were stringent and rigidly enforced.

Was it not a world-championship contest? None but the fittest might survive the test of skill, courage, endurance.

A relay horse bolted across the field, threw his rider and came galloping wildly back on the track in the wrong direction, menacing the other riders. They dodged him and went on, changed horses and dodged those who were frantically pursuing the riderless animal. But the race went on.

The Kid's "clock" continued to tick off the seconds with beautiful precision, still in the lead from sheer skill in riding. Dropping the trick roping helped, of course. The pace would have been too terrific otherwise. Stardust had a

little more speed, it seemed to him. He needed it, too.

Relay—calf roping—bronc riding—trick riding, with an interval of rest between. The Kid worked as if he were under a coach. The moment the judges passed upon his work, he headed straight for the stables and threw himself down in the hay for a few minutes of complete relaxation and rest.

The other boys did the same, by his orders. Other contestants might fool around the chutes, or pile into a cab and go hunting excitement uptown between shows—but the blue shirts returned to quarters and stayed there. It was a grind. They missed a lot of fun. They made no friendships, they drew upon themselves an increasing amount of ridicule, poisoned with dislike.

But they were keeping themselves "in the money." First, second, third—the judges learned to know those blue shirts, learned to watch them with the appraising eyes of men who recognized championship material when they saw it.

Day after day, night after night, this man dropping out, that man forging ahead, some poor fellow taking the ambulance ride into the tunnel.

The Kid's fingers learned to feel carefully in Stardust's halter buckle, for the twisted notes, each one unsigned, noncommittal, mysterious, faintly mocking but always stimulating as a glass of rare old wine.

He found one that said:

We want a touchdown!

That did not sound like Joella Germain, just at first. But then the Kid remembered that Joella had a brother in the University of Idaho, and probably was ardently interested in sports. Come to think of it, he knew she was. Shy kid, Joella. When he saw her and talked with her during the trick riding, she never so much as hinted at her little campaign of encouragement. Blushed,

though, when the Kid told her he certainly appreciated her way of keeping a fellow on his toes to win.

"I—I want you to be a champion," she said once. "I'm sorry you gave up the roping, but I can see it was too much, coming right ahead of the relay." But she wouldn't give him any satisfaction about the notes.

Another note ran:

Stay with it; you've got the stuff.

The Kid saved them all. Sometimes he unfolded and read them between performances, studying the compact, vertical handwriting. He would go to his own little retreat behind a pile of hay bales, where he went to be by himself when he was more tired than usual. Sometimes the boys came and sat down in a close huddle, or sprawled on their stomachs to take a nap. But they never saw the notes or knew that the Kid received them.

Boy had apparently fallen under the spell of grease paint and camera—which was not surprising—for he dogged the footsteps of the Happy Family, and the Kid seldom saw him save at a distance and in the company of those who were as strangers to him.

This defection of Boy's would have hurt the Kid more if the latter had not concentrated so completely each day upon winning in the rodeo that other things were forgotten.

Still, it was another pin prick to his pride, another reason why he avoided every one save his loyal team.

Then came an afternoon when Stardust and Sunup ran sluggishly and the Kid dropped to second place. It was inexplicable. They seemed to be perfectly well, though they lacked the sharp appetite after the performance that had heretofore manifested itself in pawing and nickering when he rattled the oats basin.

The Kid could not understand it. He brought the veterinary, who looked

them over carefully and said they were in perfect form, and that there was no reason in the world why they shouldn't go on and do their best. There wasn't a healthier pair of horses in the entire outfit, he declared.

The team was puzzled and worried. A hundred dollars each day they had been counting on from the relay, with the final prize of cash and cup and the championship in sight. But their spirits rose that evening when the Kid nosed under the wire a half length ahead of the pinto, and took second money for the day.

His calf roping was speedier that night because of the load lifted from his mind. And the work of the other boys speeded up also. Beck got first money in steer wrestling, Walt second. The blue shirts were more than holding their own.

But the next afternoon, which was the fifth day of the rodeo, the Kid got a real shock. It was the note which his fingers sought and found in Stardust's halter buckle. The Kid read it twice before the full significance struck him and left him dazed, incredulous and oddly thrilled. Yet it was brief as the others had been, almost.

Do you always stuff your horses with oats just before the relay? It's horribly brutal to make the poor things run on full tummies.

Oats! He looked into the feed box and found it moist from the licking lips of Stardust, with wet grains in the corners where they had eluded him. Sunup's oats box held the same betraying signs. Some one had slipped the horses a big feed of oats while the Kid was out in the grand-entry parade. Simple—simple and effective: no horse would run his best just after a feeding.

But it was not that which thrilled the Kid to his toes and set his pulse beating erratically. It was the wording of the note. Now he knew! There was only one girl in the world who would write

like that. The little devil! The darned little innocent-eyed devil! Why—why—

The Kid's thoughts raced round and round, without lucid beginning or a logical end. She'd been spoofing him from the very first—pretending to know nothing about horses—all that cruelty talk—not interested, huh?—little devil! Put one over on him.

One thing he did, however, which showed sense. Blazes and Sunup looked a good deal alike, and Blazes was fast. He told Walt and Billy about the oats, and said he was going to use Blazes in the relay. He'd just switch those two, and rope with Sunup, maybe. Anyway, Blazes would have to run in the race.

So he had one horse that day to offset the handicap some one had placed upon him, and because the fast string made trouble in the station for Carlos Baird, the Kid broke even on the race. After that they managed to keep an eye on the horses.

One other thing the Kid did, though he waited until the next day to do it. He rode out for grand entry as before, leaving Billy on guard in the stable with careful orders to watch the grain supply. But before the Kid went, he twisted a small piece of paper under Stardust's halter buckle. His fraternity pin was securely pinned inside, and underneath he carefully printed three words:

S. A. E. Such Assistance Enchants.

When he went eagerly to Stardust's head after the parade, the paper was gone and the buckle was empty.

"Anybody been here, Billy?" the Kid questioned sharply.

"Nope," Billy told him, without meeting his eyes. "A fellow came through just after the band started playing the grand march, but when he saw me he kept right on going. Pretty soon he came back, but he never stopped and he never

looked my way. The ponies are O. K., Kid. You can bank on that."

The Kid looked at him, nodded and turned away without asking if a girl had also walked that way, petting the horses as she passed. No, he couldn't ask that. Billy would wonder whom the Kid was expecting.

So once more the Kid was in a mental turmoil. Had she got it, all right? He pretended to drop something, and searched the bedding of the stall unavailingly. She must have got the note. But why hadn't she left one? The little devil, didn't she know he had her tagged? That pin ought to tell her. If that wasn't just like a girl—leave a fellow in hot water—darn her, anyway! If she thought he was going to hunt her up she was sad-lee mistaken!

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE KID IS INJURED.

SIX days of the rodeo—which meant twelve grilling contests—and the Kid was still first place in the relay, second in calf roping, third in bronc riding, doing his trick riding with beautiful precision and ease.

The other boys were holding their own and a little better, and the seasoned contestants were watching them sourly, most of them. Former champions were being winnowed out with alarming rapidity, though not from lack of skill.

"Too many parties after the night shows," the Kid diagnosed their troubles succinctly. "The darned saps, they must know they can't hit 'er up all night and get out next day and make any kind of showing! We'll make it, boys. We're going as strong now as we were the second day, and that's because we're taking care of ourselves. You can't get away from it—training shows."

"Well," gloomed Beck, "it oughta show. I wish to heck it could show us a decent meal or a good movie show

once in a while. All the zip there is in this town—and I haven't so much as crawled to the top of one of those two-story buses! If this was old Rome and we were the lions let out every day in the arena to eat a Christian or two and then prodded back to our pens, we'd be having just as hot a time as we are now. I can't say as I blame the boys that step out and see the sights once in a while."

"Same here," Billy sighed, peppering his eggs until they were black. "If a hen cackles within a mile of me, after this, I know I'll go cuckoo!"

"Only two more days after this one," the Kid tried to hearten them. "Look at our record, boys! We aren't eating gravel, anyway; that's what some of the old champs have done, and there was no reason on earth for them to cave in like they did to-day. If they'd watched—"

"Oh, yes! If they'd gone straight to bed, and had their nice mush for breakfast and their nice toast and eggs and one vegetable, maybe— Say, I wouldn't put in another nine days like this for all the cups and belts in the country! It's fine to be a champ, maybe, but it's a darn sight finer to get a little pleasure outa life."

"Look at me! If I was to break my neck to-day, what have I got outa this last week? Why, I don't know for a fact whether the Loop is a rope or a scenic railway!" Beck pushed back his plate with a gesture of disgust and stood up. "Training rules be damned!" he exclaimed. "There's a bunch going to the Bullpen for a beefsteak supper after the show to-night, and to Rainbow Gardens after that. I'm going along. Team or no team, I'm human!"

"So am I," Billy declared, leaving his highly seasoned dish of boiled eggs to follow Beck's lead. "Better come along, you fellows. It's not going to ruin anybody's life to have one evening off. Let's all go!"

The Kid finished his glass of milk

and paid for the four dinners before he made any reply. He turned afterward and looked out into the street where flowed a steady, changing river of automobiles hurrying all in one direction—uptown where the great electric signs were already winking dimly in the dusk.

"Think you'll lay down your steer in seventeen seconds to-morrow, Beck, as you did this afternoon?" he asked quietly, when an impatient movement beside him recalled him to the present.

"Oh, damn the steers! I can down one quicker with a knife and fork," flashed Beck.

"If you go," said the Kid, "don't wear those shirts."

"Fired off the team, if we go?" Billy asked truculently.

"Darn right! You know that—or you ought to know it."

"Suits me," said Beck stubbornly. "I'm getting fed up, anyway. Too damn many rules. Too much hiding out in the dark. I'm growing blue mold on my hide from living in that burrow."

"Same here," cried Billy, not realizing he was Beck's tame echo.

"How about you, Walt?" The Kid swung about, his eyes boring into Walt's face. (Eyes startlingly like Chip's when he was angry had he only known it.)

"Don't be a boob," growled Walt.

The Kid looked at him and drew a long breath before he turned to the rebels.

"Go get into other shirts, then!" he snapped. "You're off the team right now and you can't wear team colors. Once you get those shirts off your backs, you can go to the devil for all I care! Come on, Walt."

While the two stared after him, palpably regretting already their insurrection, the Kid stalked off and disappeared within the stadium, Walt striding along beside him.

"The West," said Beck finally, "was tamed on meat. You've got to show

me where the old trail bosses lived on mush and milk."

"Injun fighting," Billy averred, "was mostly done with good old beefsteaks tucked under their belts." Which was all right for an argument, of course, though it lacked authenticity.

"Well, come on, Bill. Let's go shuck these shirts and get us a square meal. We've got time enough before the show." Beck headed for the gate. "Pie!" he exclaimed ecstatically. "Planked tenderloin and French fried and biscuits—no, waffles and honey—oh, boy!"

"I'm not going to help him in the relay, either," Billy declared, as they made their way to where their suit cases were stowed. "Darned if I will! He can't get hard boiled with me."

At that very moment Walt was asking the Kid what he was going to do for a second man at the station, and the Kid was telling him he'd do without.

"I'm going to cut out the grand entry, too," the Kid went on, planning swiftly; "and I'll sleep with the horses. We can't stand guard the way we've been doing, of course. Maybe I can get Boy to stay with 'em—no, there's Shorty, crippled so he can't ride. I'll hire him to keep an eye on them when we're not around. We'll make out all right, Walt. It's those two boobs that'll suffer."

But the desertion was another stab at his pride, another blow upon a mighty sore spot. It seemed to the Kid that everything he cared for was being snatched from him by untoward circumstance. His quarrel with his folks, further embittered here at the rodeo; the utter estrangement of the Happy Family, and now the disruption of his contest team, upon which he had lavished so much time and thought, so many hopes.

Even Joella Germain, who had shown a flattering admiration for him that had salved his self-esteem when it had suf-

fered the most, had deliberately turned from him that afternoon to talk and laugh with a trick rider from Texas. He hadn't cared at the time, but now the defection recurred to him as one more instance of how he was being flouted by his friends.

Not a word from his mother, not a sign from his dad; even J. G. had not been near him nor sent any message of good will. Boy never showed up any more. It did not occur to him that he had deliberately kept out of the way of every one when he was not actually in the arena, and that Boy—or any of the others, for that matter—would have small chance of finding him, or that it was more than probable that some of them had tried and failed.

The boys wouldn't have told where he was, that was certain. Even the little twisted notes had ceased. He resented that, too, and did not attempt to understand why. She had got his pin—she could count coup, and that was all she had wanted, very likely.

It was a glowering Montana Kid who went into the contest that night. Tight-lipped, he rode and gave no quarter. Frowning, he went out and roped his calf, tied it down and threw up his hands within nineteen seconds of his start; let it go and mounted amid cheering that could not smooth the scowl from his forehead. They were careless strangers who cheered and clapped. He had no friends.

Billy and Beck, carefully avoiding his immediate vicinity, went out when their names were called and did whatever was required of them, and told each other between whiles that they couldn't see where they were any the worse because they had eaten what they pleased. They wanted to tell the Kid that, but didn't, chiefly because he would not give them a chance.

On this night the Kid did not return to the stable to rest between his contests. He did not want to lie there

alone with his unhappiness. He remained by the chutes instead, among a group of men who had plenty to say to one another but little to say to him.

He did not know that he was wearing all of his aloofness in his look and manner that night, and that men glanced at him and looked again curiously, wondering what was wrong with Montana Kid. They wondered, too, what disruption had occurred in the college team, but they were not at all tempted to ask the Kid about it.

"Here y' are, cowboy—you've drawed a dinger, shore 'nuff!" a kindly voice recalled the Kid to himself.

He had been moodily watching Billy Perry pick himself up after a vile-tempered gray had sent him spread-eagling. Billy was probably wishing he had stuck to his simple diet, the Kid told himself, wondering how it felt to fall that hard on a stomach too full of pie. Billy came stiffly back to the fence, shying off when he saw the Kid standing there.

"*Mon-tana Kid, riding Wilcie—outa chute No. 6!*" cried the announcer, after Walt had ridden a crooked jumper straight and came back grinning maliciously at the sulky Billy. Walt felt that he could afford to grin, since he was pretty sure he was in the day money. Now if the Kid got a good one they could crow over Billy and Beck.

"Look out for this one—he's a fence peeler," a slim young fellow warned the Kid as he settled himself in the saddle.

"Thanks," said the Kid, flashing the other a surprised smile—the first time his lips had relaxed since supper.

Just at first the caution seemed needless, for Wilcie gave a leap that carried him a full length out away from the gate. He stopped there, shook his head while the Kid's muffled spurs raked him teasingly from shoulder to thigh. Suddenly he stood up—and up—the Kid thought he was going over backward and leaned, ready to jump as the

horse went down. But Wilcie had other plans.

He felt the Kid loosen himself in the saddle, felt his balance shift, on guard against being crushed under the horse when he struck the ground. Then with a mighty heave of his sleek body the horse pivoted on his heels, gave a long jump and was bucking broadside to chute No. 7, scraping the heavy plank gate with shoulder and hip.

The Kid swung in his right heel and fairly lifted the murderous brute away from the gate with the jab he gave. Wilcie gave a forward lunge as he swung off and the Kid felt a sickening blow upon his knee and thigh where he raked the post as he went by. For a minute he thought he was gone. The arena whirled drunkenly before him and he had a strange illusion of not being in the saddle at all.

But the horse gave another lunge and the Kid's head cleared, his intuitive sense of balance returned. His right leg felt numb and limp. When he tried to swing it forward and back, spurring according to the rules, it seemed to him that all power was gone, all volition. Then, because the horse seemed bent on repeating the trick, the whistle blew and two riders galloped up on either side. The Kid slipped off, putting his weight upon his sound left leg.

He was close to the gate alongside chute No. 10. The horse had not at any time been more than a few rods away from the chutes. One of the judges rode up and asked if the Kid was hurt.

"Not to amount to anything," said the Kid, though beads of moisture not caused by the exercise stood on his forehead and lips. The judge looked doubtful when the Kid hopped to the fence and leaned against it with tightly closed eyes and fingers clutching at the stout wire mesh.

"Your knee? Better have it looked after."

The Kid shook his head, opening his eyes to look at the big Texan.

"Thanks, no. Got my funny bone for a minute, is all. It's all right. Skinned a little, maybe, but nothing to hurt." The Kid managed to grin, though not very convincingly.

The judge looked skeptical and rode off as the announcer called the name of another rider coming out of chute No. 1. Walt came up and took the Kid's arm over his shoulder, helping him through the gate and on to where Blazes was tied, back out of the way. The Kid was in the saddle when Tex came looking for him.

"What's the matter, Kid? Get hurt?"

"No," lied the Kid. "Knocked my knee a little—hit my crazy bone, and it sure sung for a few minutes; but it's all right, Tex—thanks just the same."

"Won't cost you a cent to ride over to the Red Cross station—you know where it is, on around here—and have it looked at. Better do that, Kid."

"I would, Tex, if it was necessary. Thanks." Then, because Tex was still looking at him rather intently, the Kid laughed. "I guess that fence peeler managed to peel about sixty dollars off my day money, darn him!" he said.

"I don't know," Tex answered, still regarding him. "You made a good ride, Kid. That damn horse is going to kill somebody yet. I think I'll take him out. You did all right, far as I could see. I'm not one of the judges, though. Just keep on the way you're going, Kid, and—" He turned and called to a man who passed, hurrying to overtake him. Perhaps he did not want to express himself further to the Kid, anyway. A rodeo manager must be a past master in diplomacy and never show favoritism.

He did not tell the Kid that Chip had sent him to see if the Kid was hurt, or that the Little Doctor had nearly fainted when Wilcie crashed into the fence.

He did not feel that it was his place to butt into family affairs.

"How about it, Kid?" Walt demanded, when Tex was gone. "How bad did he get you—on the square?"

"Not fatal, Walt. I'll be all right. You stay here and kinda keep an eye on the boys. I'll go back and get ready for the trick riding."

"Well—all right," Walt assented; but like Tex he eyed the Kid dubiously. A man might say what he pleased, but he didn't have that look in his face for nothing. The Kid was suffering; any man with eyes in his head could see that. Yet he rode off whistling—something he hadn't done at all through the whole week. Walt watched him out of sight with a feeling of helplessness, and snarled savagely at Billy and Beck when they met at the chutes for the steer wrestling, just to relieve his nerves.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### HE WASN'T QUITTING.

WITH two events—the cowgirls' relay race and the steer wrestling—following the bronc riding, the Kid did not feel that he must hurry his preparations for the trick riding; yet he had no time to-night for that relaxation which had sent him out rested and with renewed energy for the ordeal.

To-night he turned Blazes into his stall and went to his own particular nest in the hay where his bed was rolled and his suit cases were tucked out of sight. He went hopping on one foot, his teeth gritted, his breath hissing between them.

In one of the suit cases he had a few simple first-aid articles for use on the trail—bandages, iodine, a bland, soothing salve, liniment and the like. He had been thinking mostly of the horses when he bought the stuff, but now he wondered if some guiding intelligence had directed the purchase for this particular need.

He did not want to go to the Red Cross station and be pawed over and his name and his hurt recorded. The news would be sure to spread, and although the Kid had only the haziest conception of the power of thought, he shunned the idea of having every one talking about him and watching to see if he could go through.

His leg was not broken, he felt sure of that. Something had gone wrong with his knee. A bad bruise, probably. It hurt like the very devil, but not enough to stop him at this stage of the game. When he bared his leg and saw how the knee was puffed, however, a thin edge of doubt crept insidiously into his resolute optimism concerning it. Looked bad, he had to admit it; but he did not admit that it looked bad enough to put him out of the contest.

So he massaged it with gentle finger tips which he could scarcely bear upon the hurt, poured on a liniment warranted not to blister, and used a whole roll of three-inch bandage upon it.

But afterward when he essayed walking he found that the bandage helped him to set his weight on that foot. Yes, he could manage the contest, he was sure. Maybe a night's rest and more liniment in the morning would reduce the swelling and he'd be all right.

He'd have to cut out some of his best stuff in the trick riding to-night though. He didn't feel as if he could manage that two-way jump, clean over Stardust and back again; no, just the thought of that made him wince. But he could do the crawl, he guessed, and he could stand on his head all right, and do the pivot in the saddle—he'd fill in with that, turning round and round, facing backward and then forward.

And, with that stubborn determination which, if it is born of strength instead of overweening conceit, can rise to the sublimity of high courage, he did manage a very creditable performance that night.

The Happy Family, watching him without comment, knew that the bronc had not slammed him into the fence without effect, but even they did not guess the truth. Chip wondered when that darned Kid was ever going to play himself out; twice a day for seven days was going it pretty strong, and it seemed to him that the Kid wasn't holding up any too well. The Little Doctor felt a poignant relief because Claude didn't seem to have been hurt after all.

And as for Dulcie Harlan, who can guess accurately what is passing in the mind of a girl with eyes like hers? The Old Man had remained at the hotel, one show a day being as much as he could stand, so he did not know anything about it.

"Slowed you down, didn't it, Kid?" Walt commented after the performance. "You go to bed and I'll look after the ponies. How's your leg, honest?"

"Black and blue, feels like," the Kid replied casually and with a diction his English professor would have railed at. "All right, Walt, you keep an eye on the horses, will you? I want to keep off my darned leg all I can."

Then Billy and Beck marched in and got their grips, loftily informing Walt and the Kid that they had a swell room uptown. The total disruption of the team was to Walt a tragedy which dwarfed mere bruises to insignificance. The Kid's stiff-legged hobble did not seem as serious as it would otherwise have done.

How he ever rode the relay race next day, the Kid could not afterward have told. His knee had throbbed all night and the hours had passed in a half-waking nightmare. But he rode the race, and by sheer pluck in the resaddling he came in second. Even Walt never knew what it cost him.

The calf roping he missed altogether. He knew that his painful hobbling from horse to calf would merely drag out the time and advertise his hurt.

He didn't want that. Once the crowd knew he was crippled, he may as well quit. And he didn't want his mother to worry; his dad and the rest of them would say it served him right, but his mother always worried so if the least little thing got the matter with him.

So he failed to appear when his name was called for the calf roping, and that, of course, automatically disqualified him. Too bad, but he couldn't help it—and anyway, he had won quite a nice little bunch of money from day to day with his rope. It was not a dead loss.

How he ever managed the bronc riding he did not know. It had been straight hell. But the horse he drew was a "straight pitcher" and not so hard to ride as he looked. When the whistle blew and the helpers rode in, the Kid eased over behind one of the riders and so rode back to the chutes, which was his privilege.

Then he had more than half an hour before the trick riding, and he went through it. He was down to three stunts now, for he couldn't manage the crawl, and he couldn't stand on his head. He didn't dare. He was afraid he would get so dizzy he'd fall off, which would disgrace him before the multitude.

As it was, the multitude wagged their heads and said Montana Kid was drunk. The blue shirts were letting themselves go, and it was a shame when they had done so well. And this seemed to be the truth, for Billy and Beck, having broken training, went the limit and betrayed their condition beyond all doubt.

That night they were at least sober, and their work was better. But Montana Kid—so said the wise ones—was so drunk he could hardly get on his horses in the relay race. He came trailing in third, and he wouldn't have done that well if Stardust and Sunup had not laid back their ears and given all that was in them—because horses have their pride, too, and these were not accus-

tomed to seeing themselves running in the dust of their rivals.

It would not have been so bad, perhaps, if the gossip had not gone on within hearing of that box where Montana Kid was something more than a picturesque name. The Little Doctor heard, and turned to glare at the traducers; but afterward she watched the Kid worriedly. Was it possible that Claude had fallen in with a bad crowd and was drinking?

She saw Billy Perry go staggering to the fence after a steer had piled him in the second jump—Billy and Beck persisted in wearing their blue shirts, so there was no mistaking them. She did not see her Claude stagger, because she did not see him on the ground, but he certainly was not acting like himself. And beside her Dulcie Harlan was staring with wide, hard eyes and her hands clenched together in her lap. Chip did not say a word, but his face was dark and somber.

It was a silent party in the box that night, and afterward in the taxi the Little Doctor and Chip came nearer quarreling than they had in many a day, because she thought Chip ought to talk to Claude; and Chip flatly refused to do it. Let the young whelp learn by experience; it was the only way he ever would learn, since no one could tell him anything.

The Little Doctor cried herself to sleep that night, and Chip lay for hours awake, staring miserably at the reflection of the street lamps which shone on the wall, wondering what a father should do or could do with a boy as unruly as the Kid. His instinct was to wait; to give him more rope and let him have his fling. But that was pretty hard on Dell, he thought. He'd talk it over with the boys. Maybe they'd know what to do.

That night the Kid lay feverishly awake, his mind shuttling back and forth over the different events next day,

and how best he could get through them without making an awful flop. His leg was swollen so much that he had twice been compelled to loosen the bandage. His knee had disappeared altogether beneath a great discolored cushion of distended tissue. Walt could no longer be kept in ignorance of his condition, and he waited on him and worried over him until he might almost as well have been crippled himself, his anguish was so real.

"It's a darned, rotten shame!" he said over and over. "Let me ride relay to-morrow, Kid. You've got the right to put in a substitute if you're hurt, you know. I'll go tell Tex—"

"The stuff's off between us, Walt, if you do," the Kid threatened, with a note of hysteria in his voice. "I can go through with it all right. You keep your mouth shut to Tex."

"Can I bring you anything, Kid? Some coffee and a sandwich?"

"No. Bottle of milk—and aspirin. Scads of aspirin. And water, Walt. Couldn't you get hold of a bucket and fill it with ice water without having it spread all over the front page of the papers?"

"There's no damn sense in killing yourself, Kid! I can get in the relay, and you can let the rest go. Hell, it's no disgrace to be hurt, you big sap!"

"Aw, can it, Walt! Go get me that stuff and shut up. I'm—I'll be all right to-morrow."

So, while his distressed parents pictured the Kid as one of many, carousing, drinking, dancing the night away, he lay on his rumpled blankets in the hay and endured the agony of that injured knee, and planned feverishly how he would dismount just so, in the station, and not touch that foot to the ground at all.

He could manage, all right, if Walt held his horse just so. And he wouldn't try to use his right stirrup at all. He wouldn't need to. He'd take a

lot of aspirin to deaden the pain, and he'd make it. Only two more rides and he'd be through.

The bronc riding—well, of course, he could take his time about getting on—let himself down easy into the saddle, so it wouldn't hurt his leg. Maybe he wouldn't draw a very salty one. If his luck only held, in that one point, he'd maybe put it over all right. He could stand anything for a minute or two, if he set himself to stand it. They couldn't call him a quitter, anyway!

That was the burden of his weary, half-delirious thought: He wouldn't be called a quitter. His dad couldn't have that to throw at him, anyway. Nor the Native Son. He'd show them he just couldn't be whipped!

Groggy with sedatives, glassy eyed with fever, his face red and looking somehow bloated and yet haggard, he rode out to the relay next day; and even his mother had the sickening conviction that her son was two thirds drunk. And she a doctor, too.

He reeled a bit in the saddle when he reined Stardust around for the start. The crowd laughed and made wise remarks, some of which he might easily have heard if his ears had not roared so.

Yet he rode that race. Walt was seen to steady him when he rolled off at the station between laps, and the judges fined him ten seconds for that breach of the rules. But the Kid did not know or care. He was staying with it—he wasn't quitting.

How he got back into the stables he did not know, but it seemed to him in a vague sort of way that men stepped back hastily out of his way, looking at him strangely. He remembered looking at the box where his folks sat—oh, he always knew they were there watching every move he made—and taking off his hat to give them an elaborate and mocking salute.

He knew that when he bowed to them he somehow lost his balance and was

going right on down, when some one grabbed him and pushed him upright in the saddle. He had trouble then in getting his hat to stay on. It had kept slipping off—and why shouldn't it, when his head was big as a barrel? He heard the crowd laughing at something, but he didn't know they were laughing at him, because he was so amusingly lit up.

"You damn fool, you've got to go to the hospital with that leg!" cried Walt, almost in tears over him. "I'm going to tell Tex! If you go out there to climb a bronc, I'll——"

"You'll stick along and see me through," the Kid said grimly, opening his eyes that looked perfectly black as he stared fixedly at the other's face. "I'm all right, Walt. I made it, didn't I? This is the finals, man! I can't quit now—I'm not going to quit! Get that, and get it right. Hand me that aspirin."

Out in the arena the calf roping had begun.

"Walter Myers!" boomed the amplifiers. "Wal-ter My-ers!" There was a wait and then: "Not present! *Al Gilette*, the next roper!" And so Walt was disqualified while he knelt in the hay beside the Kid.

Dimly they heard the laughing and shouting that always accompanied the Indian squaw race.

"Bronc riding's next," the Kid said with slurred syllables and an eager intensity in his voice. "Help me on my horse, Walt—we gotta get over there."

"You can't!" wailed Walt. "Have some sense, Kid!"

"Damn you!" gritted the Kid. "You do as I say!"

So Walt led Blazes over beside the Kid, helped him pull on his batwing, silver-trimmed chaps, buckled them for him because the Kid's fingers fumbled so, and put on his spurs.

"You can't do it!" muttered Walt, and steadied the Kid and half lifted him into the saddle.

"Shut your croaking!" mumbled the Kid. "Give me some aspirin!"

"You'll kill yourself with that dope!"

"Aw, dry up! Where's Billy and Beck? Tell 'em to hurry; we're late as it is."

Walt gave him a startled look and made a sound in his throat as if he were choking back a sob, but he didn't say anything. He just walked close alongside the Kid with his hand on the Kid's well leg, ready to catch him if he fell.

"Mon-tana Kid, riding Overall Bill—outa chute No. 1! Montana Kid, folks, riding Overall Bill outa chute No. 1!"

"Say, that guy's spifflicated!" one of the men at the chutes told his companion. "He can't ride."

"Let 'im take a spill, then!" The other laughed expectantly. "Do 'im good. I knowed he wouldn't last through the finals. All them rah-rahs is layin' down, yuh notice."

"O. K.!" shouted the Kid deliriously. "Throw wide the pearly gates—I'm going to flew!"

So they laughed and opened the gate. And Overall Bill, a big brown who was a fighter from nose to wicked heels, lunged out with a high, crooked jump and a kick for good measure. Dead silence, then a prolonged "O-o-oh!" like a groan. Overall Bill took a final kick at the limp figure on the ground and went careening down toward the gate by the Indian camp, kicking at the saddle as he went.

"Sit still, Dell!" Chip commanded sternly, over in the press box. "He had a fall coming to him. Gee whiz, do you think he's the first fellow to be piled?"

"Oh, I know, but—but he isn't getting up! He—oh, let me out! *Let me out*, I tell you! He's hurt!"

Over there by chute No. 1, men were bending over the Kid. Other men were running to the spot. The black

ambulance came shrieking through the gate and over to the place.

In the press box ten people rose like a pew full of singers in a church, and started for the gate. Oddly enough, when the Little Doctor pressed through she glimpsed Dulcie Harlan a good ten feet ahead of her. Yet the Little Doctor would have sworn she was the first person out.

"Up this way," cried Harlan, mysteriously appearing at her elbow, though she had not seen him before that day. "It's quicker. I've a car that'll take you around in half the time you could walk it." He urged her up and out through the gate, the Old Man and Chip following. But Boy and the Happy Family streaked it straight across the arena, where the ambulance was already disappearing into the tunnel from which it had emerged.

How it happened no one knew, but Dulcie Harlan was riding inside, with Walt and the doctor. Walt talked fast. So the ambulance kept right on going until it backed up to the surgical entrance of St. Luke's Hospital. At that, two cars followed close and arrived before the stretcher was wheeled into the corridor. Wherefore Harlan could speak for a private room and the attendance of the best surgeon in the place.

They wheeled him down other corridors and around turns and finally out of sight into a room where only his father and mother were permitted to accompany him, the anxious-eyed little procession coming to a helpless stand. But in five minutes or less they wheeled him out again—now robed in immaculate white—and into another room where two surgeons waited to receive him.

His small procession again waited outside the closed door, until a nurse took pity on them and led them into a near-by room where they could sit down. Many and many another group

had sat there waiting for news from the closed room beyond, hoping and fearing and sometimes praying. And at last Chip, paler than they had ever seen him, came out to them.

"Darned mutt!" he said huskily. "He's been riding with a smashed knee for Lord knows how long. They're taking X-rays now to see whether he loses his leg or keeps it."

"Oh, then he *wasn't*—" Dulcie had no intention of finishing the sentence. "I knew all the while—"

"No, it's that leg. The doctors in there said it was a hospital case from the start. They can't see how he kept going."

"I know," said Walt, and cast a reproachful look toward the Native Son. "Just nerve, that's how. He was bound nobody should call him a quitter."

"Good Lord!" muttered the Native Son, and turned to stare out of the window.

The Old Man suddenly struck his cane sharply on the floor.

"Dog-gone it, he's got more nerve than the hull bunch of yuh put together!" he cried. "There ain't a one of yuh that'd stand up under what he done. There ain't going to be any more of this naggin' at him, either; not while I'm around, there ain't!" He glared up at Chip. "You oughta be proud of 'em, dog-gone it! Ride here all the way from home, and—"

"Oh, forget it!" snapped Chip. "No need to rub it in, J. G. All I'm thinking of now is that leg."

They had time enough to think of the leg—plenty of time. Chip went back and stayed and stayed, while the Happy Family fidgeted in the waiting room. It seemed hours before they wheeled the Kid out again and down the corridor. They had just a glimpse of him as they passed the door; face white and still, eyes closed—just as he had looked when they took him from the ambulance.

They trailed after, sheepishly, know-

ing they were neither wanted nor needed, the Old Man hobbling his fastest to keep up, mumbling pettishly to himself.

They were standing grouped at a corner, not knowing which way the Kid, the Little Doctor and Chip, the white-coated attendants had gone, when one of the surgeons came along and took pity on them by sending them home.

"You can't do anything at all," he said smoothly. "He won't regain consciousness for hours, probably. His leg is in a bad way—but he has lived a clean, healthful life—no bad habits apparently—may carry a stiff knee the rest of his life, but we're going to save that leg if possible."

"'If possible'!" snorted Pink, as they went disconsolately down the steps, helping the Old Man who had suddenly lost his briskness. "Hell! I thought they had *doctors* in this town!"

They were back the next morning, but there were others before them. Dulcie Harlan, for one, wearing a diamond-shaped fraternity pin conspicuously on her white-wool sweater, and sitting very demurely on a straight-backed chair close beside the Kid's two pillows, against which his face looked wornly radiant, if you know what I mean.

Gleaming whitely on the sheet pulled with hospital smoothness over his chest, stood a tall silver urn—though it was called a cup—with two graceful handles which the Kid's fingers caressed proudly.

"Hello," he greeted the four members of the Happy Family cheerfully. "You know Dulcie, I guess—lookit what I got! Relay cup! Walt rode for me last night—Billy and Beck, here, helped. That's the advantage of having a team. Great boys, Walt and Beck and Billy. You met them—you must have. What do you think of my ponies? Pretty nearly as good as the

horses back in them good old days, what?"

"Pretty near—not quite," grinned Andy.

"How's the leg?" Mig asked anxiously.

"He's going to stay put for a while at least," the Little Doctor told them smilingly. "For a month or two I'll know where he is and what he's up to—and that won't be much, I promise you!"

"I might be up to quite a lot; you don't know," the Kid retorted, glancing sidelong at Dulcie Harlan.

"It'll get all right, will it?" Weary persisted.

"Oh, yes," she assured them. "It will take time. He'll be on crutches—maybe for three or four months." Curiously, the Little Doctor said that almost as if she relished the idea! "But we'll save the joint from going stiff, I'm sure. Modern surgery can do wonders. He'll miss school, though, I'm afraid."

"Yes, you're afraid—like fun!" the Kid twitted her. "You and dad will be darn glad to get rid of me when I do get out of the repair shop!"

"Not when it gives us an excuse to winter in Chicago once more," she told him. "We haven't, for ages."

"I know where there's the darlings apartments in an apartment hotel, right up near us," Miss Dulcie Harlan hinted demurely.

The Kid grinned at his new silver cup.

"I'll leave Dell and J. G. here with the Kid, I think, soon as he gets out of the hospital," Chip said. "I'll have to keep an eye on the ranch. But there's no reason why they shouldn't stay as long as they like."

The Kid kept on grinning and turning the cup so that Dulcie's face was fantastically reflected in its polished side. He was still grinning when the nurse came into the room and shooed them out.

THE END.

*Watch for more stories by B. M. Bower.*

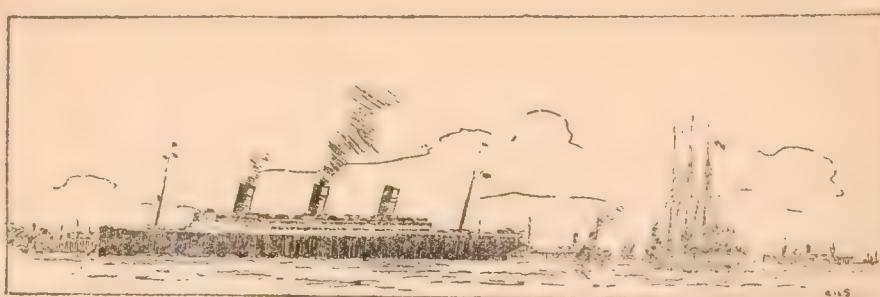


### BIRDS THAT WERE BLAMELESS

THE irascible farmer had a grudge against red-headed woodpeckers. In a corner of his prize wheat field was a small grove of oaks in which the woodpeckers had their nests. There was the wheat, and there were the woodpeckers. Obviously, the birds were stealing the grain.

Arming himself and a hired man with shotguns, he went out one morning to exterminate his beautiful enemies, and when the shooting was over, five of the birds had been slaughtered. But this was not enough. He and his man cut down three of the trees so as to capture and kill the young woodpeckers in the nests, because, the farmer said, the parent birds had carried off the wheat as food for the fledglings. But when the youngsters' crops were cut open, not a grain of wheat was found. The woodpeckers had been feeding them nothing but wood seeds and the kinds of bugs and insects that were pests to the farmer's fields.

The truth is that most birds render man a tremendous service in keeping down the number of harmful and destructive insects, and the layman who kills a bird without definite knowledge that it is a marauder, usually makes a tragic mistake.



## NO FACTS WANTED

*By BERTON BRALEY*

I WATCH the great steamers departing  
For Sarawak, Rio, and Rome,  
But I'll never be on a ship oversea,  
I've got to stick 'round here at home.  
I'll never see Bangkok or Shanghai,  
Calcutta, Bombay, or Lahore;  
And though I may dream of their temples agleam,  
It's only a dream—nothing more.

My spirit may roam with the rovers;  
My flesh has to tread in the mill.  
I'm hitched to a house and my kids and my spouse,  
And roving is not on the bill.  
Though mine is the heart of Ulysses,  
I cannot embark on his trail;  
My eyes follow ships as they steam from their slips,  
But that is as far as I sail.

Yet, maybe my dreams are the better  
Because they can never come true,  
For Ports of Cathay might prove dingy and gray,  
And Samarkand's gardens be few;  
But now they are misted with wonder,  
Their glory untarnished and pure;  
Facts, leaden and tragic, can't shatter their magic,  
My stay-at-home's dreams shall endure!



# The SCARLET SIGN

by Frederick Niven

*The author of "Face It, M'Son!"*

Old Man Palmer and his son were ready to fight the whole Northwest.

**I**N the spring of '85, Oliver and Dick Palmer—father and son—were digging, and digging hard, into the face of a cut-bank beside their ranch house in the old Northwest.

They did not know what was going to happen. But they knew, by the signs, that something was afoot. And the dugout they were making might be necessary for a last stand. They were not going to leave the place. Not by a jugful! They had worked hard on it. Suppose they did flee, in a panic, leaving the ranch unprotected. The trouble would blow over and they'd come back, maybe, to ashes in place of a home, and have to begin all over again. So they had two mottoes. The first was: "We'll stay with it." And the second was: "We'll stay with it." That is to

say, the father growled it to the son, and the son intoned it to the father. "Stay with it." And they dug.

A hundred yards off was one of those old, old prairie trails that were like the Roman roads stretching into immensity. It was thronged all day long by warlike cavalades passing by, going northward. They had been summoned by some western equivalent of the old-time Highlanders' fiery cross. What a company! Attila's Huns doubtless looked something like that. There were screaming-wheeled Red River carts laden with provisions. There were half-breeds driving them, all sullen. Indians came along in scattered groups, by the half dozen, by the score, their ponies' hoofs spouting up the dust of the road. It had been mud there, quite recently,

after the going of the snows; but soon it was dusty, dry.

These rode with no great noise. Sometimes, in fact—especially the larger parties—they went past like deaf mutes, talking to each other volubly, but all by signs. Perhaps they were keeping up practice, thought the Palmers, peering out from the lone ranch, for the time when they'd be riding where enemy scouts might hear, if there was a babel of speech. Queer to see them go by like that, conversing with their hands.

One never knew when they were passing. One could look out of the window, though having heard no one pass, and see dust drifting and dropping on the road to the north, and the tails of the horses of a party that had just gone by, swinging away in it. Other times the creak of the pulley over the well would announce a party. For often, at sight of the well, a group would swerve from the road. The riders would dismount, and the Palmers would see them bobbing up and down at the windlass drawing water.

"Looks as if they was going to leave us alone, whatever it is," said Palmer, Sr., and bit off a chew of tobacco.

Young Palmer said, "Uh-hu!" and also bit a chew.

And in between times they worked at the dugout in the cut-bank, because of the main worry on their minds—Mrs. Palmer and little Edith.

Sometimes, while digging, Dad Palmer would remark in his stolid way: "Yeah, it's hell for women on a frontier, when there's trouble."

And Son Palmer would reply: "Yeah, it might sure be hell, dad."

The railway that the ranchers wanted was, as a matter of fact, what precipitated all this stir. The half-breeds of the settlements up North did not want it. Its coming meant, they surmised, a tightening of the grip of the encroaching whites. The Northwest Fur Company—that was nothing. The Hudson's

Bay Company—that was nothing. In lean years it even fed them—on credit, of course, but fed them—and put the amount on the slate, to be worked off in a fat year. But the buffaloes were going and the cattle were coming in, and one could not shoot cattle. These men in the red coats were definite about that. The cattle did not belong to everybody as had the buffaloes.

The Palmers were not the only people digging such dugouts. Much as, over all the world, we find races, unknown to each other, inventing the same things for the same needs—so it was then, all over the Northwest. The minds of the scattered settlers were thinking alike. These lone ranchers, hanging on, had imagination enough to realize that, if the worst came to the worst, a hole like that of a prairie dog might be the best place for the last stand.

But, so far, even if the Palmers were out working in the field, these traveling armed men did not come across to them for so much as a fill of tobacco. They were going somewhere, with only grim, sidelong glances at the ranch house.

"They ain't botherin' us," said Old Man Palmer to his troubled wife and daughter over supper one day, trying to reassure them. "They just take the water and keep on a-goin'. Guess it's not us but the redcoats they're after. They're kinda civilized, you know. They know soldiers from civilians."

Mrs. Palmer said nothing. She had learned history of a sort in school back in lower Canada. And history is full of fearsome hints of what may befall when the soldiery on one side can fight no more and the scum of the victorious army gets loose. Mrs. Palmer said nothing, but she was sore afraid.

Now and then, as well as the hordes riding north, lone riders went south—swiftly, as if on urgent business. And the day came when the cavalcades did not just water and pass. They took to

coming over to the ranch. Rifles hung from their shoulders. Knife hilts showed at their belts. Some of them, even, when they plucked their blankets round them, showed, in that motion, war clubs hanging from their wrists, quirt fashion—war clubs of a stick with a stone, or a chunk of jagged iron, fixed at the end by rawhide that, in drying, had tightened.

Young Palmer made an outward show of insouciance. After the departure of one such visitor, who had seemed to want nothing—only to pry round and look and leer, Dick said:

"That there club he had hanging from his wrist could give a person a nasty little sore."

Old Palmer seemed pleased at the remark. His face broadened in a smile and he had another chew. Then they went back to their dugout, digging again. As a rule they did not work on that when the legions were passing. To be seen doing so might suggest that they were afraid.

"We mustn't let them think we're scairt," old Palmer said once.

But one day as they worked, making the dugout strong, they did not hear an arrival till a whole party was there. A party with unshod horses' hoofs, and silent riders. They came with less stir than the faintest wind in the grass, unlike the screeching Red River carts.

"What you dig, heh?" The question brought father and son around in the hole in the cut-bank.

An Indian was there, dismounted, looking in. He was a great, big fellow, both tall and deep-chested. Plaits of braided hair hung on either side of his seamed face. An eagle feather stood up behind his head. He stooped to clear it at the low entrance. Others were behind him, entering in the same way, with soundless moccasined tread, the only noise being the froufrou of their fringed buckskin leggings.

The one with the long eagle feather

stood in advance, his arms folded, and a rifle lying in the crook of one.

"Root house?" he asked. But he asked it with a grin and a glitter.

"Aw, something like that," replied Old Man Palmer.

"Good," said the Indian, and examined the place. "You make side hole, too." He nodded. "Good! Maybe some mans shoot straight into root house. Then"—he grinned again—"roots go into side hole."

That little warren of a place seemed crowded with them. Outside their horses stood with trailed lines. This big man seemed the only one who could speak English. He talked to the others in an Indian tongue that the Palmers did not know. Cree was all they had even a smattering of. Maybe these were Assiniboins, thought Dick. It was hard to tell.

Old Man Palmer thought it an opportunity to ask questions, too. At least he'd treat it that way. Inwardly he was sick with anxiety. The women were over at the ranch. Perhaps other members of this party were even then across at the house, rubber-necking there as these fellows were here. Here were these men with an air, to put it at the mildest, of familiarity, crowding into the dugout.

"Where you men go?" asked Palmer, the elder.

"Oh, we go north," said the one who had a smattering of English.

"You go visit? You go heap big dance?" suggested Palmer, though he knew it was more than a heap big dance that drew them, painted and armed, and with none of their squaws along. He hoped it was not a simmering trouble of white and red after all. He hoped that the reason for having been left alone by the journeying warriors for so long meant that it was Indian against Indian. Maybe, he hoped, these were even Sioux from south of the line, perhaps going to war over something with

the Crees to north. But, even so, he wished this visit was over.

"You see by and by," the Indian said. "I not know sure. But maybe white mans go, all same buffalo. Then maybe buffalo come back." The fellow had English, and he had also a savage's notion of possibilities.

"Then maybe white men come back once more," said Palmer, easily, as though this were but a sort of friendly debating society in the dugout.

The Indian thought that over.

"Not one time more," said he. "Next time Indian kill first white mans before too much white people come." And then suddenly he broke out in a savage's inquiry: "Where you white men come from? I think you come all same leaf. Wind blow, leaf fly."

He made a gesture expressive of his opinion that white men were like that in their origin—like leaves flying from a tree, like sowing seed by the fistful. The others clustered closer. It was a strain. But these were days of strain. Suspense is hard to bear. It is the hanging on in uncertainty that brings lines under the eyes.

Then abruptly all turned away. They went from the dugout. The Palmers followed, the one thought between them—that others might be over at the ranch. But none were there. They had all come to where they saw the men working, curious as to what they did.

The Indians passed over to the well for water. The house they left unvisited, still treating it as they'd have whites treat their tepees on a visit to their camps, as places to be invited into, not to march into. Having watered their horses straight out of the well bucket, they mounted and rode on, paying no further attention to the Palmers.

"Well, that's that," said Old Man Palmer, and produced a plug of chewing tobacco. He looked at it thoughtfully, thrust it back in his jeans, said: "Have a smoke," and got out the other

plug and knifed it carefully into shreds in one of his palms, as the dust of these last visitors sifted down on the road—going, going, gone.

They discussed again that night, *en famille*, various possible procedures. One of them might ride over to "town" and make inquiries as to what, precisely, these warlike preparations meant. Yes, one might—father or son. But that would leave only one man behind. Or they might all get into the wagon and start off for town and safety there. Yes, they might. But that would leave a ranch untenanted, to be burned, perhaps, while they were away. So the motto remained: "Stay with it." Dad Palmer thrust his plate forward in sign of finality and produced a splinter of wood for post-prandial toothpick.

"All the same," said he, "it's hell on women on a frontier when things are clearly mounting up for trouble, and nobody knows what."

"The women can pray," said Mrs. Palmer.

That remark left them all decorously silent for quite a spell. Palmer was secretly doubtful of the efficacy of prayer, should these savages going past every day decide to turn on them. What faces trooped before his memory! They were faces, many of them, as of men out of another epoch—an epoch far back in the world's history. They were human beings, with their own affections, no doubt, but their own cruelty and relentlessness, also. They were like men of the stone age living on into the present.

Next day the strain was snapped. It was snapped by shooting.

The horses were out on the prairie, and now and then, from the edge of the low butte near by, father or son would look out to see they did not stray too far. Dick, in the afternoon, went to bring them in, because it was advisable to have them in the stable at night. They might be needed.

As he was rounding them up he saw

a little dust rising on the road off to south and coming north. He had herded them together—all but one, a fresh and playful beast. It decided to give him a chase before going home. He galloped off after it, got beyond it, turned it back. Then it dashed in among the others and sent them off. Dick bent forward in the saddle, throwing out his arms over his horse's neck, lines in hand, and went rub-a-dubbing parallel with them, passed them, reined in, and rode back and forth to head them home. They wheeled and then, behind, came a quartet of riders. They were those who had raised the dust to the south.

Everywhere over the Northwest, had Dick only known, men were experiencing the same sort of thing. Everywhere it was touch and go for a scrap. It was as if some signal was awaited. Take it easy, take it cool, and nothing happened. Get angry, or get rattled—getting rattled was worse—and there were bloody incidents ahead of time—before, as it were, the real drop of the hat.

After Dick came that beat of hoofs. After him came voices whooping. But they were not utterly warlike. There were shouts of laughter now and then blent with the yells, these ululant yells reminiscent of coyotes.

Dick got his bunch of horses back to the sickle of low bluffs where the ranch nestled. There, of themselves, they wheeled, slackened speed, milled; then, as the charging Indians screamed again, they went off at a tangent in a wild flicker of hoofs over the open prairie. But the Indians, at breakneck gallop, swept on toward the house.

Well, Dick was not twenty-one then. His father might have acted otherwise. It takes years to achieve aplomb in the face of such things. Dick had not that aplomb then. He thought they were going to rush clear on to the house. Only four of them there were. He could not see his father. He let out a shout:

"Ho, dad! Look up!"

No reply. He dropped from his saddle and, dashing for the dugout, snatched from a cranny a rifle that lay there always ready. The Indians were then wheeling and milling before the ranch. They looked after him, saw him emerge with rifle in hand. And at once they were out of their saddles for steady aim, and shooting at him. The bullets plugged into the dugout front, where already the Palmers had put stout shoring timbers. Down on a knee went Dick, hugged that butt to his cheek, and fired.

An Indian fell in response to the rifle's crash. Then the three others were firing, two at him, one toward the house, aiming for a window. The sheets of glass there were splintered. There came a shot from the house, and another Indian was down. The remaining two, hunting cover, dodged behind the wood pile. But one was revealed to Dick a moment as he stealthily pulled out one of the billets to make a loophole.

At that target young Palmer took a snapping shot. On the other side the man must have fallen against the pile violently, for it toppled, slid down at the end, billet rolling atop of billet. The last Indian, taking cover there, turned and ran. He did so with a left-right jiggling motion, very barbaric in effect, primitive, an old strategem of war to make an erratic target. In that series of unequal dodges he headed for a horse that had been unable to run off, like the others, with trailing lines from the scare of the shooting. Its forehoofs were entangled.

If he got away! If he got away the beans would be spilled indeed. That was Dick's thought as he took aim. He missed. The Indian had the lines in hand, was on one foot for the spring to mount the cavorting horse. *Slam!* from the house; and he went down. It was over.

Dad Palmer came out from the porch and Dick went to meet him, urgently

inquiring: "Mother and Edie all right?" And this is what he got from that parent of his, so restrained as to seem phlegmatic:

"Yes, yes. But man, Dick, you ought to have let them start it! It was you coming out with that rifle done it. I thought you was only taking cover. But once started we sure had to finish it."

"Why, dad, they were——"

"They were what? For all you know they were only having a bit of fun with you and the horses, or, at the worst, trying to stampede them without a shooting."

Well, that was Dick's father. Dick said nothing.

"You can thank God," said Palmer, "there ain't any got away, or you'd have spilled the beans for sure. Even now, you see, their horses are off and to hell and gone over the prairie. Pray God they keep running till any Indians that come on them riderless won't account it special to us. But I guess it's the dug-out now for us all. So many of them traveling, they are liable to come on them horses and just take it out of anybody permiscuous, without asking who done it. Ah, well——" He ended with a sigh, as though he thought that, after all, a lecture was of little value now, and that, after all, things might have been worse.

It was dusk before they had the bodies buried. No horses came back out of the lengthening shadows from the rolling land. And these shadows deepened. Inside the ranch house they found Mrs. Palmer on her knees. She rose as they entered.

"Well," said Palmer, "it's hell——" He corrected himself, because of what she had been about on his entrance: "It's hard, I mean, for a woman on the frontiers. But I guess this will blow over, whatever it all portends, Martha."

"I'm not complaining," said she. "I guess it's a case of 'Trust in God and keep your powder dry.'"

"I guess we'd better move over to the dugout, right now," said he, "after what's happened, till we see—what we'll see."

So they moved over there with food and water. The women slept in one of the niches that the big Indian with the one eagle feather had commented upon, and the men rolled up in the main chamber.

Away off to north that night was the sound of tom-toms throbbing, throbbing on and on. And now and then, in the gusts of wind, there came, thin and far, the chanting voices of a great host. There was something appalling in the repetitive crescendos of that chant, far carried in the night. It gave the effect of a savage multitude coming jig-jigging toward them, then going off, then coming back again. It kept waking the two men.

"There must be an awful bunch of them dancing somewhere. Sounds as if it was carrying from miles and miles away," said Dick.

"Well," said his father, "they haven't started anything serious yet, while they're making that commotion, I guess. That would be advertising it over all the land."

"Or maybe they have," replied Dick. "And it's maybe a celebration after a big scrap. Maybe they've wiped out every last——"

"Sssh!"

Dick hushed, that the women might not hear. But from the niche where the mother lay came her voice, a thin whisper, intermittent, guarded. She was praying, praying.

"Ya! It's hell for a woman," muttered Old Man Palmer, and reached out to feel just where his rifle lay, before dropping off to sleep.

The place had a deserted look in the morning when they peered out, because of the horses being absent. Old Man Palmer went up on the butte and reported the scene all vacant except for

Dick's saddle pony that he had been riding when rounding up the horses. It had not gone far, with trailing lines, and now was standing there as if waiting to be claimed. So Dick went off for him and, leading him home, put him in the big barn and fed the bullocks there. That chore over he came out to find his father watching on the top of the low butte and his mother and Edith back at the house, and busy.

"We've got to keep clean," said Mrs. Palmer, "and this being washing day, I'll do the washing."

So she and Edith attended to the washing while the men watched and waited. Unless any unwonted circumstance delayed him, the redcoat patrol would be along that day or the next. The full significance of all these trekkings of warlike men would be explained.

The view from that butte was so wide that it seemed safe enough to Palmer, nothing being in sight when dinner was ready, to come down and eat without sending Dick up to watch while he ate. If nothing was in sight over these distances, then nothing could arrive in less than half an hour or so. That was the idea.

The meal over, they mounted up there together, Old Man Palmer a little ahead. Suddenly, just on the last lap of their little twisting rut of a trail, as his head came level with the top, he ducked.

"Down! Down!" he said. "The biggest bunch yet."

They hurried back to the house.

"Over with your mother and sis to the dugout," said Palmer to his son. "Quick! I'll rake off the stove so there's not even a haze of smoke."

Mrs. Palmer, with half a dozen homemade clothespins in her mouth, stared at him.

"Just drop the washing," said he, "and come on. The dugout's the place now for you women, anyway."

Over they went and mother and

daughter passed into that side chamber with its loamy clinging odor of recently dug earth and its darkness hardly relieved by faint reflected light from the front portion. It struck Edith, sitting quiet in there with her mother, that if they lived through all this she would never forget that dusky hole, that earthy smell.

At the door outside Dick looked back for his father. There he came, smartly, but with no fluster. There was that in Old Man Palmer that resented any evidence of being finally up against it. They passed within, shut the door, and watched at the loopholes.

And then came Indians and half-breeds, with noise. Nothing of the leashed manner about these fellows, but a deportment cock-a-whoop, unrestrained. A party of them, prodding their horses with drumming heels, swept toward the house with quavering whoops.

But suddenly all that shouting band of riders reined in so that their horses reared up like unicorns, reined in and wheeled away.

"What's all this, do you suppose?" muttered Old Man Palmer, pressing close for a better view.

He saw the riders sweep back clear to the road. They did not go on upon it. They crossed it. They rode away off to east over the gray-green rolls and out of sight of his angle of vision.

Questioning and puzzled he looked at his son. Then he turned to the loophole again.

"Coming back?" asked Dick, who, on his side, had a more restricted view.

"No, no."

They remained listening and, at last, no further sounds coming, were on the point of going out to pry over the bluff to see if any other parties followed. Old Palmer crossed to the niche to tell the women he was just going to have a peep out and see if any more were coming. Back at the door he had, indeed,

his hand on the bar to throw it over. But Dick, who remained looking out, put a restraining hand on his arm.

The father looked again through his slot. What he saw was three mounted Indians riding to the well. They were naked of body, wearing only, as for one, buckskin trousers, and as for the other two, blanket ones. The tails of their horses were braided up. They were heavily armed. They rode straight to the well and one slid from his horse, off-side, Indian fashion. But he did not touch the windlass. One of those still mounted spoke. On the instant the dismounted man was back on his horse. They wheeled away abruptly. They passed on, looking over their shoulders as if they saw there some terror invisible to others. Then one of them turned back and rode south.

When they had passed from sight, Palmer slipped the bar over and crept out.

"Now you stay, Dick," he whispered. "I'll just slip out and have a peep over the cut-bank."

He came back lost in thought.

"It beats me," said he.

"What?"

"They're still coming north, lots of them. But they are not on the road. They keep heading off it south a bit and circling back onto it after they get past here. It beats me. They are giving us a deliberate miss, passing right off on the prairie."

"It's an answer to prayer," declared Mrs. Palmer. "Say, Oly, a person should not forget prayer, should not only remember it in times of trouble. It's not what you might call polite and seemly. It's like being what they call a fair-weather friend. We ought to be thanksgiving in good days, instead of only asking for help in dark ones."

He looked at her, rather worried. The strain, he thought, was telling on her.

"I guess," said he. "All the same,

we won't go and make a smoke, lighting the stove to cook supper. That might be too much."

"Maybe better not," she agreed. "We can eat the victuals we have cold and drink water instead of coffee."

The shadow of the seemingly forsaken ranch house lay out long to east. The shadow of night came hurrying to meet it, and darken it into the one even amber stain of twilight. And so that day, that had mystery added to suspense, ended.

They dozed. They woke. They listened. It was tiring and worrying. But at last, weary, away on when the Great Dipper was going down, they fell asleep.

A shout roused them. The two men lurched to their feet, grabbed their rifles, leaped to their lookout peepholes. The golden morning was on every long, low, wavelike crest. Over at the house was a red-coated horseman. Behind him, some little way, was another; and just behind that one was a group of riders clad in civilian clothes, but all armed.

"Hullo, there, Palmer! Anybody around?"

It was the sergeant in advance who hailed.

Dad Palmer opened the dugout door and hurried across to him, Dick following slowly. The little group of horsemen behind the sergeant saw Palmer first.

"Here he is!" they shouted.

"Gosh, man!" ejaculated the sergeant. "I'm glad to see you. I thought you had all gone."

"Gone? No, we stayed with it."

"Is it the womenfolks taken sick, then?" asked the sergeant, glancing beyond Palmer and seeing Dick.

"Sick? No. We're just laying low in the dugout. There's been such a heap of hostile-looking Indians and breeds——"

"Say," interrupted the sergeant,

"what's that hanging at your door for, then?"

He pointed to the house. On the clothesline, at the door, hung one red petticoat.

"Gee!" said old Palmer. "The missus was washing when we hunted cover. Guess she had hung that up and just left it. But what of it?"

"What of it? Why, man, don't you know the sign? It is one of our jobs to tackle too, when we see it. And if the folks are dead we got to burn the buildings."

"Burn the buildings!" said Palmer, puzzled.

But the sergeant again interrupted, exclaiming:

"Yeah! I'd rather tackle a dozen whooping Indians or half-breeds than do it. I don't mind saying that I'm scared of smallpox. You can't wrastle it, or shoot it."

"Smallpox! I don't get you."

"Why, that's the sign, man, from the Barrens to the Missouri. That's the sign for a house with the plague."

"Well—I—never—knew—that! Say, that accounts for the way the last of them have ridden away off on the plain, giving us a wide berth."

"I should say it does, if that's what they've been doing. They'd never think you used the sign crooked, either." And the sergeant laughed. "It's up to them, so as not to have worse befall, to use the scarlet sign honestly."

He was relieved. He preferred war to pestilence.

"So your missus put the sign up by accident, eh? Well, I'll tell you why we're here," he said. "There's a rebellion on foot. It's in full swing now. We don't know what proportions it may get to before it's stamped out. I've no orders to force you off the place if you want to stay with it. And if you do decide to stay we can detail some men to stop with you, at least at the present stage, till we see how it goes. That's up to you. But I've orders to advise, and very strongly at that, all settlers with womenfolk along to get their womenfolk to safety. There is a big military force coming in from the East, but hell may be popping before they get here."

Palmer turned and saw his wife and Edith in the dugout entrance.

"Well, that's fine. It's hell for women on a frontier in such days," said he. "But, sergeant"—his voice went low—"they're wonderful, those women over there. Don't you tell the wife about the significance of the red sign at the door. Maybe she'll find out some day, or maybe she won't. But she thinks these rebels kept circling off from the house as an answer to her prayers. Guess it would please her a whole lot to believe it was an answer to prayer."

"And maybe it was, too—at that," said Dick, who saw deeper, or more subtly, than his stolid dad.

*Features of the*

**FIRST  
DECEMBER  
NUMBER**



*On the stands  
November 7th*

## THE ISLE OF THE FATES

By FRED MacISAAC

The beginning of a superb romantic novel of adventure  
in the South Seas.

## SHOW MAN

By CLAY PERRY

A complete novel with a real punch about a man who  
ran a wild West show.

# A Chat With You

WELL, it feels like autumn and winter, doesn't it? Do you know, we are always rather glad when this time of year comes around. These frosty mornings, these bustling winds that scatter the brown-and-golden leaves across the gray sidewalks, these evenings when the warm, yellow lights in the homes look so cheery—what can spring or summer offer that compares with the melancholy yet pleasant charm of this season?

Is autumn sad or gay, we wonder? The leaves are falling, yet their colors are those of a carnival. One person writes of the "melancholy days," but another of "October's bright-blue weather." Another sees only the dismal wintry skies, but a Dickens tells jovially of happy, red-nosed folk, muffled in their greatcoats, stamping through the snow to reach their dinners of luscious roast turkey!

Perhaps the best way is to give in to both moods. Melancholy is one of the most beautiful emotions; geniality one of the most enviable.

\* \* \* \*

THE fall brings Hallowe'en and Thanksgiving Day. Two wonderful holidays. We have always felt that Hallowe'en, in spite of its real significance, is symbolic, too, of the season in which it occurs. The grinning jack-o'-lanterns—they are ripe pumpkins, pulled out of the harvest field. The man, by the way, who has never carved a toothy, grinning face out of a "punker" and set a candle inside, has missed one of the vital experiences of life.

OUT in the country these holidays seem to have more meaning than in the city. In town, all the store windows display orange papier-mâché jack-o'-lanterns and crêpe-paper witches on broomsticks, but you don't get the same thrill out of them. There's nothing like the original. When you can see that pumpkin growing in the cornfield, or watch and hear that old gobhler parading around, then you get the true spirit of the autumn festivals. You are in touch with nature.

\* \* \* \*

MOST festivals, amusements and sports are based on the serious business of life. We feast and make merry in honor of our religions, historical anniversaries and harvests.

In our amusements we seek the plays and movies, books and magazines, all of which tell of people's problems. Even the comedies deal with human troubles, burlesqued. When the clown falls down, we laugh—not realizing that we are trying to learn how to laugh at our own misfortunes. When we watch a juggler, we envy the adroit way in which he manages a number of confused, hurtling objects. We would like to manage our troubles as skillfully as he does his whirling dishes.

\* \* \* \*

OUR sports are based on competition and combat—the keynotes of our daily struggle for bread and shelter. The games of the ancients developed the strength, skill and courage needed in battle. To-day, boxing, football, baseball, tennis and other sports demand the

same qualities. You see, even in our play we are serious.

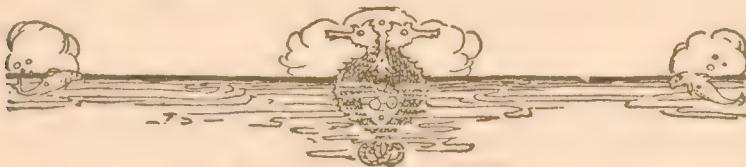
Nature has made it so. Watch the cavorting of a lamb, the dashing of a colt, the maneuvering of a kitten. They think they are only playing, but they are really preparing for the work of life. Nature is a great sugar coater; she makes us turn even our pleasures to her great unknown purpose.

\* \* \* \*

WE were thinking of these things while reading a novel recently. It is a good novel. The story has to do with birling logs in the water—a sport

of the timber country. Two men get on a log, one at each end, and revolve it with their feet, each trying to trick the other into falling off. A ticklish sport, and one that is based on a serious, hazardous kind of work—logging on a river. You will read about it in Clay Perry's new novel, "Show Man," in the next issue. His story is up-to-date, and takes place at a carnival in the big woods. You will like it.

That issue will be an exceptional one. Fred MacIsaac, William Hemmingway, Mark Reed, Will McMorrow and others will make it a brilliant number. Every story in it carries our enthusiastic stamp of approval.



**Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, published semimonthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1928.**

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Ormond G. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of the Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editors*, Richard F. Merrifield and Philip Conroy, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers*, Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.;

George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Annie K. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

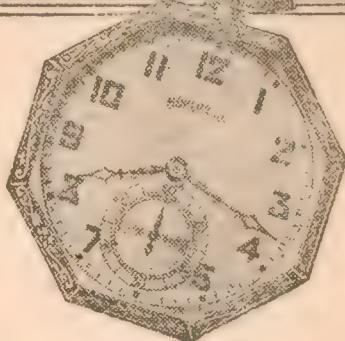
3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

ORMOND G. SMITH, President,  
Of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1928. De Witt C. Van Valkenburgh, Notary Public No. 184, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1930.)

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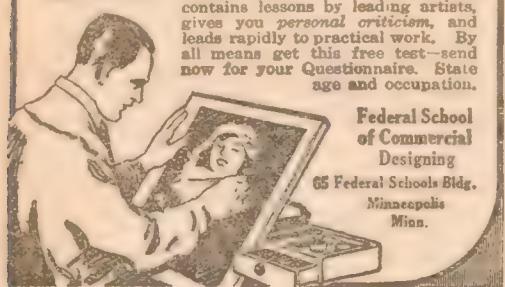
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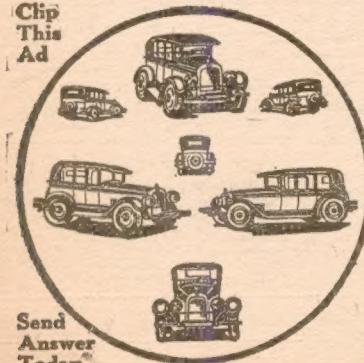
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